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ALBATROSS  
◆ NOVELS ◆



THE  
GARSTON BIGAMY



ALBERT ROSS

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**New York**

# THE GARSTON BIGAMY.

BY ALBERT ROSS,

AUTHOR OF

MOULDING A MAIDEN," "IN STELLA'S SHADOW,"  
"HER HUSBAND'S FRIEND," "HIS PRIVATE  
CHARACTER," "SPEAKING OF ELLEN,"  
"THOU SHALT NOT," ETC.

*"I had not kissed you then. There are tigers in Asia, I have read, that having tasted human flesh will eat no other food."—Page 151.*



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## TO MY READERS.

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The publisher tells me that he has left two pages for my usual preface, and I wonder what it is best to fill them with. For really I have very little to say to you this time, except to renew the assurances of my gratitude for the marvelous success you have made for me, and to express the hope that I have again succeeded in producing something which will meet with your favor.

Gerald Garston is not a hero. Very few men are if you come to think of it. It is the women of this world who do the noble things. How many men have you known who would sacrifice their all for a woman? But such a sacrifice on the woman's part is so common that it hardly evokes comment.

It is my method to paint things a little as they are, and not altogether as they ought to be. It is one thing to discuss immorality, and quite another to defend it. The principal characters in this story made a grievous error, and they learned it after much suffering. If I have not made that apparent I have surely failed in what I meant to do.

The carelessness of American marriage laws is notorious. Perhaps in no other civilized country could such an escape as Gerald's be so easily found. That it is possible here no one will attempt to deny,

but it will not always be so. Some day your children will pick up a copy of this book, and ask if laws like these ever actually existed.

When this volume is published I expect to be in the south of Europe. The laborer is worthy of his hire, and the author must have his rest. But my publisher will admonish me if I idle too long, and my next book may be written where the sweet face of nature smiles across the great inland sea.

This will explain the reason if my correspondents, who have become so numerous, fail to receive replies to their kind and flattering epistles.

ALBERT ROSS.

Permanent Address:  
No. 33 West 23d street,  
New York.

# THE GARSTON BIGAMY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### HOW THE TROUBLE BEGAN.

Nothing but grain as far as the eye could see. Nothing but wheat and corn and oats and barley and rye. Colonel Staples, who was showing the country to Mr. Grosschen, agent of the Iowa Investment Company, stopped the handsome pair of horses that he drove in order to allow his guest full time to take in the prospect. The unpracticed eye of the new agent, whose principals were Eastern capitalists, could not tell the wheat from the rye, nor the barley from the oats. He saw merely a fascinating succession of waves of green, through which the summer wind rippled like a breeze in the veritable waves of the ocean.

The horses were presently started again, and the two men rode up out of the ravine, where a wider range met their vision. There were the steeples of a village over toward the west. There was a mill, evidently used for the grinding of grain, and by its side a reservoir, fed by a stream that meandered through the country to the north of it and furnished



drinking ground to the cattle on a dozen farms before it turned the wheel that set the heavy machinery in motion. There were clumps of trees here and there upon the mostly open prairie, and small gardens, protected by barbed wire fences from the incursions of stray animals. There were bits of pasture, and glimpses of buildings, and in some places laborers were at work in the fertile fields.

"It's a fine country," said Colonel Staples. "There's no richer land in the State, in my opinion. You're safe to let all the money here you can get mortgages for. But there's a farm," he continued, pointing as he spoke, "that neither you nor any other man will ever get an incumbrance on. It's the finest in this region, twelve hundred acres and more, with all the buildings needed, and the most improved tools of every kind. It belongs to Alvah Adams, who owns the mill there too, and the best residence within forty miles, and can lend you a few thousand beside if you happen to get short. There's a place! Look at it! You don't often see land kept like that in these parts. You wouldn't think, would you, that he came out here twenty-five years ago with only three hundred dollars, and took up his hundred and sixty like any other poor young fellow? Well, that's what he did, and all he's got since is by hard work, and good farming, and looking ahead. Nobody ever left him a penny, or gave him anything he didn't pay for. His father was a poor grubber in New Hampshire, who let him have his "time," as they call it there, when he was nineteen, and when he died, a little while ago, left less than two thousand dollars as the result of a life of toil. He willed this to Alvah's daughter—we all

call him Alvah,—so you can't say that any of it has come to *him*. I tell you, he's a man for the town and county to be proud of!"

Mr. Grosschen laughed.

"It's lucky for the Iowa Investment Company that too many of your people don't follow in his footsteps," he answered.

"Well, if you want one of the other kind, you'll find him on the next farm," said the Colonel, "and a mighty good specimen, too. John Garston came here the same year that Alvah did, and took up the quarter section adjoining his. They had been boys together in the same town, and when Alvah got a notion that he wanted to go West he told John of his idea. They talked it over, sitting on a stone fence back of Alvah's father's barn, and agreed that both would ask the old folks to give them their "time" till they were twenty-one, so that they could go off somewhere to work and get a little money to start with. It was right there that the trouble began. Alvah's folks seem to have been half decent about it and willing to do something for him. John's were just of the other kind. Alvah came over in the morning to say that he could go, and John had to report that he couldn't. Alvah offered to go in and argue the matter with the old man Garston, but it did no good. He was a tough skinflint, who proposed to get what he could out of his boys now that they were getting big enough to do something. There is a notion down in that part of the country that a father's will is law, and John never thought of running away. He just gave up on the spot and went back to hoeing corn and grubbing roots, but the ugliness in him grew faster than any other crop

he raised. He got so hateful that the old man was glad, I guess, when the time came that he could go. I've heard that John never stopped to say good-bye, or to ask the paternal blessing, but threw down his rake—it was haying time—and started. They couldn't think for an hour or two where he'd gone, till one of his brothers happened to remember that it was his birthday and then it struck the old man Garston all of a sudden that John had asked him once what hour he was born, and that he had told him it was between ten and eleven in the day. John had given him the benefit of the off half hour, as the clock had struck when he started, but he was never seen in that town after that forenoon."

Both the narrator of this history and his listener found a good deal of amusement in it, and the Colonel, after pausing to see that Mr. Grosschen was duly interested, continued his narrative.

"Some of these facts the people here know, and some, I suppose, have grown with the telling, but sure it is that Alvah went down to Nashua and got work in one of the factories. He saved every cent he could, and as soon as he was of age, came out here looking for a piece of land to preempt. He wandered around for awhile and then concluded that he couldn't find anything better than this. He filed his papers and took up the quarter section where his residence is now, and then wrote to John to come out just as soon as he could get clear. John answered, saying he should have to quit home without a cent in his pocket and that it would be a good while before he could earn enough to pay his fare to Iowa. Alvah thought it a pretty hard case, and as other prospectors were looking this part of the

country over, he wrote again, sending fifty dollars to his friend and urging him to waste no time in getting here. It was a mighty generous thing of him when you remember that it was about a fifth of all he owned, and he needed it to develop his farm about as bad as he could. But he sent it, and John came; and after looking around a little, he picked out the claim next to Alvah's and with his help put up a shanty on it, according to the government regulations, and began to break ground. One piece of land was just as good as the other, for Alvah offered to swap even with him if he thought there was any choice. That's the way they started.

"Well, nothing seemed to go right with John. He and Alvah exchanged works, for a spell, but Alvah had enough to buy a yoke of oxen and a plow, and John had to hire his plowing done. John always said it wasn't a fair race, and he got discouraged before he reached the quarter-post. He couldn't see anything except that Alvah had got ahead and that he couldn't catch him. It's been the same from that day to this. Alvah has kept forehanded, always having something laid by, and never going into debt, while John has been a little to the wrong side of the ledger all the time. It's seemed to work on his feelings. He compares everything of his to Alvah's. Let him have a crop this year bigger than he ever had before and he will look across the fence and tell you Alvah's is bigger. Tell him he's got a hundred and sixty acres of the best land in Iowa, he'll answer that it's mortgaged for all it's worth and that Alvah's got twelve hundred and forty without a cent of incumbrance on it. And that isn't the greatest ground of grievance that he's got against Alvah, either."

Mr. Grosschen looked much interested, and inquired with elevated eyebrows what else there was to annoy this peculiar and unhappy man.

"It was a woman that finished whatever of common sense he had left in him," said the Colonel, dropping his voice instinctively, though there was no person other than himself and his guest within hearing. "After he had worked away at his land for a year or two, there moved into the neighborhood a widow with a handsome daughter. The widow was of Spanish descent, several generations back, and her daughter inherited the rich dark beauty of that race. The young men hereabouts were all wild over her, but the mother was proud as she was poor, and declared that none of those who aspired to the young lady's hand were good enough to be considered eligible. Among those who tried to win her was John Garston. If ever he was sincere in anything it was in his love and admiration for that girl. He forgot his work, neglecting everything on his place for an entire season, so wrapt up was he in this creature, whose mother had sent men flying with ten times his brains and a hundred times his possessions. At last the senora spoke to him with plainness, forbidding him to come to the house. The daughter obeyed every word of her mother's without question. He had a stormy scene with both of them. They were so alarmed that they sent, or the mother did, for an officer. John was hardly less than a crazy man that day, but he went away quietly at last, and it seemed for awhile as if he had got over his infatuation. Then came the crowning blow. Within a year it was announced that the senorita was to marry Alvah Adams!"



"That *was* hard luck," commented Mr. Grosschen.

"Somebody told it to John, in the post-office, and he staggered as if he had been stabbed at the heart. There was fear that mischief would be done, but nothing happened. He went back to his work, and was only, to outward appearance, a little more surly than he used to be. Soon after Alvah's marriage John brought home a wife from another town. He never ceased to speak to Alvah when they met, but the conversations were never very long ones. He hasn't forgiven him, and he won't, but I guess that's all it'll ever amount to. Some people at first advised Alvah to be careful, and to carry a pistol, but he only laughed at them. More than twenty years have passed now, and things have gone on just the same. Here's his house."

The horses were brought to a walk as the gentlemen passed the handsome mansion and grounds of the wealthiest man in Jefferson. It is not the habit of the ordinary Western farmer to devote a great deal of attention to the merely ornamental, and Mr. Adams' place was decidedly unique in this respect among those about it. The house, tastily designed, roomy, and surrounded by broad verandas, stood upon rising ground, five hundred feet from the highway, and was reached by a winding driveway bordered with Lombardy poplars. The spacious lawns on each side were well kept, and were dotted with shrubs and trees that added much to their loveliness. Fine buildings, used as the family stable, carriage house, etc., were visible beyond, but those intended for the working teams, vehicles and tools, as well as for the cattle, were some distance away, shaded from the street by an artificial grove and reached by a



road running from another avenue. There was a conservatory and even several fountains, besides other evidences of thrift and taste, exciting the envy of many of the neighbors, who could not see, as they expressed it, why an Iowa farmer need put on the style of a "Fifth Avenue New Yorker."

Far away stretched the fields of this prosperous man, the evidences of careful cultivation being fully apparent on every side. Clearly nothing was wasted on this large estate. The fences were in perfect order, and built of materials likely to last for many years. Where a piece of land was low, a carefully constructed ditch had been dug. Where it was so situated that it was in danger of suffering from dryness, irrigating pipes had been laid. Land was so cheap in Iowa when these improvements were first introduced that many of Adams' fellow farmers sneered at them, but he went on his own way, paying no attention to their raillery. He was obliged to keep a large force of men, and carried out these improvements in seasons when they had plenty of surplus time on their hands. He certainly had the satisfaction of owning the best kept farm in the State, and one that produced more on the average per acre than any other. And if this were not enough, his comfortable bank account had long ago proved that there was something worth considering in methods that placed one financially in advance of those who criticised him.

Starting the horses into an easy trot the travellers soon came opposite the farm of John Garston. No information other than that afforded by the eye was needed to tell where the line of Mr. Adams' land ended and that of his neighbor began. On the Gar-

ston place no attempt whatever had been made at ornamentation and hardly any at even ordinary care for appearances. There was the common farmhouse, with dilapidated outbuildings. Carts, plows, etc., were scattered about the yards, exposed to the weather. A pile of uncut firewood and a rusty axe added to the general evidence of shiftlessness. A cow grazed untethered on what might be called by courtesy the front lawn, occasionally varying her meal by breaking the branches from a young apple tree that Garston had planted in one of his moments of extraordinary enterprise.

"He wouldn't fix that yard if you were to pay him for it," said Colonel Staples. "He likes to brood on the hard luck he has had in comparison with Alvah Adams, and he has done it so long that he really takes delight in making the contrast between the places as great as he can. There's only one thing that comforts him, and that's his son Gerald. The boy is a fine young fellow—about twenty, now—and is nearly through college. But it isn't altogether because John has a son that makes him happy—it's a good deal more because Alvah hasn't. Alvah's got a girl, seventeen years old, just the age of my Edith—they've been companions ever since they were babies—but the desire of his life has been for a boy. John knows this, and I think it's the only thing that keeps him from dying of ugliness. He's said to me many a time, 'Alvah would give that mill of his and half his land for a boy like mine, but he can't have one! Rich as he is, I have one thing that no money of his can buy him!' If you are here next month you'll see Gerald, and you'll find him very different from his father. Queer how little

pedigree seems to count in the human race, sometimes !”

A big black dog at the mouth of an unpainted kennel growled savagely at the passers, and seemed regretful that he could not break his chain and get at them, in order to revenge the slighting words in reference to his master. A hen with three half-grown chickens scratched vigorously at what might at some previous time have been a flower-bed. The cow, in her efforts to masticate the branches of the apple tree, stepped upon its slender trunk and crushed it to the earth. A slatternly servant girl came out of the house, and, seeing what the animal had done, took up a clothes pole and belabored her unmercifully, causing the creature to run toward the barn, the milk streaming from her udder as she did so.

“Any one who would do that to a new milch cow ought to be prosecuted !” exclaimed Colonel Staples, impatiently.

“I should think young Gerald would find his home little to his liking, if he is the sort of lad you describe,” ventured Mr. Grosschen.

“So he does. But he and his father understand one another. Gerald is to be a lawyer. He will have nothing to do with the farm. His father would not let him dictate, any more than he would me, about anything here. If Gerald made the mistake of opposing him in such matters there would be a break right away.”

They had passed the Garston boundaries and were approaching the house where the Staples family resided—a section dignified by the name of “The Village.”

"What kind of woman is Mrs. Garston?" asked the financier.

"Oh, she died years ago. Perhaps if she had lived things would not be so bad."

The village of Jefferson\* had a hundred houses in it. Colonel Staples owned one of the prettiest of these and it was soon reached.

"There come the girls, now," said the Colonel, brightly, as he glanced down the road toward the High School.



## **CHAPTER II.**

### **"WHERE HAD HE HEARD THAT TUNE?"**

Colonel Staples had not in the least magnified the jealousy of John Garston for Alvah Adams, in the talk which he had with Mr. Grosschen. It would have been difficult for any one to do that, were his statements ever so extravagant. The steady accumulation of wealth by his rival, while he could not even hold his own, had laid the foundation of Garston's hatred, and the marriage of Adams to the handsome senorita filled to the brim the cup of his hatred. There was no immediate outbreak between the neighbors, for Adams took care that there should be none, but Garston grew less amiable each year, being wholly unable to conceal the bitterness that was in him.

\* This is not the Greene County Jefferson, as the reader will readily perceive.—A. R.

At the time of Alvah's marriage John tried hard to make himself believe that he did not care. He said to himself that this girl with her extravagant notions would ruin her husband by the luxuries which her tastes would demand. She would not long be satisfied with the humble cottage to which he took her, or willing to ride in the old fashioned wagon which had answered for him.

But this did not give him much comfort, for the wish to wed this girl had been the strongest passion of his life, and he could not live it down, try as he might. And it did not add to his serenity when he discovered, as time went by, that his prophecies, even in this respect, did not turn out at all according to his expectations.

It is true that the new wife did no work in the kitchen and that one of the first things which Alvah did after his marriage was to purchase a carriage for her, to which he harnessed a pair of his young ponies, that she might have as good a team to drive as any lady in the county. It is true that he hired another servant and seemed to be always bringing home something new in the way of "fancy things," as John contemptuously called all articles of house or personal adornment. Notwithstanding this, however, there were no signs that Adams was approaching bankruptcy. His credit was still as good as ever, though he seldom had occasion to test it, and his purse was long enough before the year had expired to take in and add to his quarter section another of the same size which adjoined it, and which the owner wished to sell that he might return to the East and take possession of a fortune left him by a relative. Perhaps his success may have been partly

due to the fact, that while John sat in his house fuming and fretting over the progress of his neighbor, Alvah was up betimes directing his laborers, planning to save in his methods and getting everything out of his property that it could be made to produce.

A cold wave came unexpectedly, and John found six of his calves frozen to death outside of the cow-stable. The door had been left off its hinges and the little animals had wandered out into the lighter atmosphere when the gale blew down the bar. Three promising colts were caught in a drenching storm because he had not ordered his men to drive them in upon the sure signs of its approach. His farming tools rusted in the outer air, as have those of many a Western farmer since the first plowshare tore open the golden heart of that vast territory. He lived from hand to mouth, always a little in arrears always paying the ruinous percentage for accommodation which prevailed then in his section.

And while John was doing this, Alvah went to the opposite extreme.

"I hope you're not taking wheat in to sell now," said he to Garston one winter morning, as he met him on the road driving a pung-load of filled bags toward the nearest market. "Why, it's gone up five cents within a week, and it will be twenty cents higher before two months. Take it back, man, and put it back into your bins again. It's like throwing it away to sell it at the present price."

John knew as well as Alvah, that in all probability grain would be higher soon, but he had a reason strong enough to keep him from accepting the well meant advice. He had a note coming due the next



day, which must be paid, and the wheat was the only available thing he had to pay it with. It angered him to think of Alvah, standing there with his free advice—a man with plenty of cash on hand, and granaries bursting, but he deemed it the part of wisdom to conceal his feelings. So he muttered something about only taking in a little that he had promised in advance, and that no one could ever tell for certain just how the wheat market would go, and drove on.

That evening he stopped to tell Alvah, with malicious satisfaction, that when he got to the market he had found wheat falling in price, and the buyers predicting that it would be down to sixty cents before it was any higher.

"Let it fall," said Alvah, pleasantly. "It's got to rise again, as sure as you are living. These men can manipulate the price all they like, but they can't go on lowering it forever. I shall keep mine till it's ninety cents, and perhaps a dollar."

"One farmer can't buck these big combines," replied John. "They might make us keep our grain a year."

"Well, then, I'll keep mine a year."

"That will tie up a good deal of capital," said John, warily. He wondered how long Alvah could stand that sort of thing.

"I can borrow, if necessary," said the other. "But I have an idea better than that, and if this conspiracy against us goes on much longer I shall carry it into effect."

John did not like to ask what this plan was, and he did not think from the tone which Adams used, that he meant to reveal the secret, so he only said

that he must be going, and started his horses along the road.

“Poor fellow!” exclaimed Alvah, as he saw him disappearing. “I fear he will never learn to manage his affairs on business principles.”

Alvah sold his wheat the next June at the dollar he had set as his limit, but he had been doing a good deal of thinking in the meantime. He did not like to be in danger of having to take the price which some combination might designate. There was a little stream which ran through the new purchase which he had made, and one day Garston was astonished to see men at work building a dam, and making a banking around a natural depression as if to create a reservoir. Curiosity led him to go over and see what was being done, and when he arrived Alvah told him frankly that he was going to have a grist-mill there.

“We have been going on long enough,” he said, “selling our wheat and bringing our flour and bran from a distance. I have sent for the necessary machinery and a miller, and shall be grinding wheat within three months. When the farmers can get their grain ground so near at home they will feel less necessity of selling it to those Eastern sharks at any price they choose to pay.”

Garston could not help his face showing a shade of pale green.

“You are doing this for the benefit of the community, of course,” said he, dryly. “Not for your own advantage at all.”

“By no means,” laughed Adams. “I am doing it just as I am the rest of my business, in the hope to make money. But it *will* benefit the neighborhood,

for all that, and I am glad to have it. I wonder nobody thought of it before."

"Every man hasn't got a stream on his land," growled John.

"No, that's true. It's queer how things turn out. When I bought this quarter section of Darling we both thought this brook a disadvantage, as it took up so much of the surface, especially in the spring, when it is apt to run over. Now it seems likely to become worth more than I gave for the whole farm. I have another idea, too. I am going to run some pipes across the fields and irrigate the uplands in dry times. There's lots of things I can do with that bit of water," he added, with a smile.

John went home and gave himself up to his sour reflections. When his wife came to call him to dinner he refused to eat. He felt that luck was against him, and that all he could ever do to combat it would never place him on terms of equality with Alvah Adams. He was as well off as Smith, Robinson, and Jones, to the south of him, or Parsons and Brown, to the west, but he could compare nothing except with Alvah. So long as Alvah's kine waxed fatter than his there was nothing in life for him.

Nothing? Yes, there was Gerald. Alvah had no boy, as yet, though that would probably be the next thing. The farmer came out of his retirement at the sound of his baby son crying in the arms of his mother. For no music was to him like that cry. No harp, no lute, no violin in the hands of a practiced player could have given such pleasure to his ears as the wail of the little fellow who bore his name, and was to keep alive his generation.

He saw the mill builded and noted that the line

of teams which came to it with grist sometimes choked the narrow road. He saw a second set of stones arrive, while a heavier millwheel, a taller dam and a greater reservoir succeeded to the first. He saw the foundations of a mansion laid on the rising ground above the little cottage to which Alvah had taken his bride. He saw the stately proportions rise, till the cupola and the bay-windows and the conservatory looked down on his own humble roof as if in derision of so poor a neighbor. People had come to allude to Adams as a prosperous man.

When Gerald was four years old, the neighbors met one day, Adams riding with his wife and young child. Garston shrank at the contrast which their equipages presented. But the teams had hardly met and passed when he looked at the handsome boy on the seat beside him and thought of the baby girl that Mrs. Adams had carried in her lap.

"She would give more to have a boy like that," he muttered, "than for all he will make out of his farm and mill in the next twelvemonth."

He had a strange satisfaction in taking the little Gerald by the hand and strolling past the house of Adams at some time of day when he would be likely to meet him. As open-hearted as John was the opposite, Alvah never hesitated to express his regret that no son had made his advent in his mansion, and he always praised the lad with which his neighbor had been blessed.

"A splendid boy!" he used to say. "We have a dear little girl, John, that we love with all our hearts, but both my wife and myself feel it strongly that we have had no boy. It does not seem right to complain, when God has given us so much to be

thankful for, but if we only had a son we could ask for nothing more."

Garston always walked back to his home with a lighter heart after these interviews. There was one thing in which his possessions exceeded those of Adams! As time went by and no other child gladdened the Adams household, John grew confident that the disparity would never be removed, and this reflection kept him from utter despondency.

When Gerald was eight years of age and Alma five John went to see a doctor of the town, who was the attendant at both his own house and that of his neighbor. Mrs. Garston had been ailing for some days, and he asked the physician to call and see her that evening. Then something turned the conversation towards the Adamses.

"It's a pity about Mrs. Adams," said the doctor, reflectively. "Alvah would give anything for a son, but it will never be. She will never have another child. There are reasons which make it impossible."

And he went off into a learned dissertation on the troubles of women, never doubting that John would experience the same sympathy in the case that he himself felt.

Garston went out into the air and found that he could walk more erect. Alvah Adams would never be the father of a boy! Whatever happened, his poorer neighbor would always have this advantage. He knew in the depths of his heart that it was contemptible to let this sentiment take such root there, but it had spread itself so long that there was no way to kill it now. Never a boy in the Adams mansion! Never, never, never!! All the way



Some he repeated those words to himself, and he could not get the music of them out of his mind. Never, never, never—a boy!

He walked into his house, humming a tune, of which these words were the refrain, but a servant came toward him, with her finger on her lips. She pointed toward an inner room, where he knew his wife lay, and he realized that something had happened. The tune stopped as suddenly as if it had been broken off by a blow, and the man strode hastily into the apartment beyond. It took but a moment for him to realize that the worst had happened in his absence.

John Garston cared for this wife, though he had not given her the passionate love which had well nigh swamped his barque in earlier days. He uttered a cry of grief as he saw her lying there, pale and still, and realized that she had spoken to him for the last time in this world. Never, never, would she speak to him again.

"Never, never, never!" Where had he heard that tune before?

He did not think of marrying again, but lived alone with his boy till the latter went away to college.

After Adams had become accounted a rich man, with his farm and mill, the war of the Rebellion came. Colonel Staples, who was interested in railroad building, had had experience in the militia, and accepted a commission to raise a regiment for service at the front. The first man who wrote his name on the register at the recruiting office was Adams. He had not consulted his wife before taking this step, and she had, naturally, many tears to shed when he



came home to tell her. What could she do with those large interests—she, who had never had the least care of anything outside her own household? But when he had talked it over with her, she admitted that he was only doing his duty, and afterwards developed such a capacity for managing affairs that he was pleurably astonished.

The men of his company elected him second lieutenant, and afterwards he was made captain, on account of gallantry officially commended in his colonel's report. He remained till the war closed, taking but two brief furloughs to run home and attend to things that required his presence. One of the earliest recollections of Alma was being awakened from sleep one night and clasped in the arms of a strange figure with a great beard and brilliant uniform. She was inclined to cry, for the assurance that it was her papa conveyed but little information to her infantile mind, but she was given his belt and sword to play with, and soon fell asleep again. Adams used often to say that he did not believe he had a dollar less than if he had shirked his duty and stayed at home from the struggle of arms; but, he used to add, "If it had taken all I had, compelling me to go further west and start life again on the open prairie, I would have enlisted just the same."

He asked but one thing of his soldiers and the people of Jefferson when the war closed.

"Don't call me 'Captain' any more. I am proud that I bore the title, and grateful to the country for giving it to me, but now that the war is over, call me Alvah, as you used to."

And when they found that he really meant it, this wish was law to his friends and neighbors.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### BRUNETTE AND BLONDE.

The two young girls that Colonel Staples had pointed out to Mr. Grosschen were admitted on all sides to be the prettiest in the village of Jefferson. The wide range that feminine good looks can take was well shown in the totally different styles of beauty which they presented. Alma was almost entitled to be called a brunette, and by contrast with Edith she might have been taken to be one. Her hair was a very dark brown. Her eyes were deep brown also, and her skin of a shade more common in the South than in the descendant of the New Hampshire race. As often happens, Alma was even more of the Spanish type than her mother, following the law which causes heredity to take leaps and bounds over intervening territory.

She was one of the most perfect girls in regard to health that could be found, and had never known what it was to be ill since the days of her babyhood. Now, at seventeen, she was of medium height, straight as an arrow, round with the fullness of a perfect development, possessing a figure like that of a not fully ripened Hebe. It would have delighted the soul of a sculptor to have seen the manner in which she carried herself, and it sent a thrill through the

veins of many a man who had no claims to the sculptor's talents when she appeared in his presence. Perfect strangers, who had met her on her way to school, had paused to watch till she was out of sight, even three or four years before the date of which I am writing. They had asked the next person whom they met the name of this independent little beauty, who walked as if she owned the earth and felt able to maintain her possession. And they had gone on with feelings that seemed unaccountable toward one so young, whom it would be folly to think of otherwise than as a child for a long time yet.

The girl knew that she was considered handsome, almost as soon as she knew anything. It could not escape her ears even when she was toddling about the parlor, and the visitors at her mother's thought it no harm to voice their delight at her infantile prettiness. Being the only child, she might have been spoiled by the constant petting which she received, but she had inherited a pride of another kind. Having acquired an idea that she was a person entitled to consideration, she early learned that this demanded from her equal consideration to others.

By comparison with Alma, Edith Staples would have been called a blonde, though she was not of that pronounced type which the Swedes and Germans lead us to think of in connection with that expression. Her hair was light, her eyes blue and her complexion as fair as if the sun of heaven had never touched it with his warm rays. This was not due, however, to any special care on her part, for she was not foolish enough to make a god of her beauty or to avoid the caresses of the great luminary. On the

contrary, she had a habit of going out of doors in pleasant weather with her hat hanging by its strings to her arm, and a parasol she cordially detested. The tan simply would not stay on her face, and nothing varied the clear paleness of her features but the charming waves of color that came and went at the least provocation, chasing each other on and off like so many crimson-tinted shadows. She was slenderer and slightly taller than her friend, and in all respects cast in a more delicate mould. Strangers in Jefferson varied in their opinions as to which of the girls was lovelier, but the villagers never came to any conclusion. Each was perfect in her own way; and as neither of them gave the slightest encouragement to any of the young men of the place, except Gerald, they were considered as something to be admired from a respectful distance.

Gerald Garston had known Alma all her life, and Edith from her sixth birthday. It was when he piloted little Alma to the primary school, himself already elevated to the dignity of a grammar scholar, that he first saw the two girls together, they having made each other's acquaintance at recess and formed an instant liking which time had only sufficed to cement and strengthen. He and Alma had to pass Colonel Staples' house going and coming, and from the very first the trio walked that distance together, until they became familiar figures to everybody who lived along the highway. John Garston did not particularly like it to have his boy so "thick" with Alvah Adams' girl, but there was no way in which he could prevent it without seeming more unneighborly than he then desired to appear.

Year after year, till Gerald passed through the

grades of all the schools that Jefferson could afford and had reached his seventeenth birthday, he came and went with the two girls, almost without variation. He was a manly little fellow, and while an occasional schoolmate would try to get up a laugh on him because he had these feminine companions, the majority of the boys stood by Gerald and refused to consider it anything amusing. When he was only ten years old a particularly obnoxious youth took to calling names after him, as he started off with the children, designed to irritate both his feelings and theirs. After bearing it for several days without replying, Gerald suddenly left his charges one evening and proceeded to administer the severest kind of correction to the cause of the trouble. He had the young fellow down in the dirt of the road and had made his countenance assume a most unwonted appearance before the girls knew what he was about. Neither of them had ever seen him in a temper before, and at first both were much frightened. The whipped lad was bawling lustily, and Gerald's blows showed no signs of being anywhere near their end. Edith's disposition was to run, and she started to do so, but Alma went to where the punishment was in progress and laid her hand on Gerald's shoulder.

Then the boy seemed to realize for the first time what he had been doing. At Alma's touch he rose and took a step away from the prostrate figure.

"Do you think you will call names after me again?" he demanded.

A smothered negative came from the bruised mouth.

"If you ever do," said Gerald, "I will kill you the next time."

He went back with Alma to where Edith, pale and trembling, awaited them.

"How could you!" she cried, when they had resumed their way. "I never was so frightened."

"What frightened you?" he asked, a little alarmed.

"I was afraid he would hurt you."

Gerald looked back contemptuously, disdaining to consider that suggestion.

"I didn't think he could hurt *you*," said Alma, "but I was afraid you would hurt *him* more than you meant to. He *was* very aggravating, though."

"It is terrible to fight," said Edith, with a shudder.

Gerald was already ashamed of the degree of temper which he had exhibited, and not inclined to say a great deal in his own defense.

"It is terrible to be called names, too," put in Alma. "I almost felt as if I could whip him myself for what he said to Gerald. If I had seen that Harvey was able to hurt him, I should have gone to help."

Thus the girls discussed the occurrence until they reached Edith's gate, when Gerald said:

"Don't let us talk any more about it, Edie. I want to forget it."

She readily consented and the boy declined an invitation to come in, not thinking that he presented exactly the appearance that fitted him for any one's parlor. He walked on silently with Alma till they reached her house.

"I think I ought to thank you," she said to him,



thoughtfully. "What Harvey said was meant to insult us girls as much as you."

"I don't want to talk about it, Alma," he repeated. "I want to forget it just as soon as I can."

That night some one told John Garston that his boy had been fighting with Harvey Holmes. He learned substantially the true particulars of the matter, which convinced him that his son had merely resented an insult in a somewhat savage manner. Not at all displeased with the occurrence, so long as his boy had proved a victor, he concluded not to let the lad know that he had heard anything about it. Some of the village lads complimented Gerald the next day on his prowess, and several men in the town gave utterance to similar words of praise but the only effect was one of annoyance. Gerald was glad when the thing died out of memory, and though he carefully avoided Harvey after that, he took no pride in the victory he had won over him.

It was natural that Gerald saw rather more of Alma than he did of Edith, as she was the nearest neighbor that he had. He knew in an indefinite way that there was something of ill-feeling on the part of his father toward hers, but it did not interfere with his friendship for the little girl, whom he regarded in a sort of paternal fashion, being, when he first began to escort her to school, so much the elder. He was always welcomed cordially at the Adams mansion, both of Alma's parents seeming to entertain a great fondness for him and encouraging his visits in every possible way. Colonel Staples also gave him invitations to come to his house, considering him the sort of boy that one could encour-

age, even when one had a young daughter who was the apple of his eye.

While Gerald was not less fond of boyish sports than others of his age, or took a less prominent part in the games of his own sex, he found plenty of time to be with Alma and Edith. His father had no notion of asking him to assist about the farm. He had early concluded that the boy should adopt some other means of getting a livelihood, more in accordance with what is usually called the life of a gentleman. The boy's studies came easy to him, and the rest of his time was practically at his own disposal. The girls were nearly always together, either at one house or the other, and few days passed, either in school or vacation time, that Gerald did not see a good deal of them.

Edith was of a much more sensitive and shrinking disposition than her girl friend. Alma hardly knew the feeling of fear, while it required very little to set the nerves of Edith into a tremor. Alma was venturesome, Edith retiring. If the trio were out in the wood, and came to a small stream which they wanted to cross, Alma would boldly walk the narrow log that spanned it, or spring lightly from one of the stepping-stones to the other. Edith, on the contrary, would seek up and down its banks for some more favorable crossing, rejecting for a long time the offer of Gerald to carry her over, accepting it at last only when no other way presented itself, and then with many doubts of the result. When they were safely on the opposite side, she would laugh at her foolishness, declaring that she would never be afraid again; and the next time she would go through identically the same fright and hesitation.

Once a snake came across their path—an offensive thing—and Edith fainted. Gerald was so much startled at this that he allowed the creature to get away, though he had grasped a piece of wood with the intention of destroying it. When he saw the limp body of Edith sink upon the sward he was more alarmed even than Alma, who ran to the nearest water and brought her straw hat full to throw into the face of the unconscious one. When Edith recovered her senses she begged to be taken home, and Gerald took her in his arms and carried her for a long distance. Alma lamented that the snake had not been killed, as she wanted to show it to her father, but Edith declared that she should die at the mere sight of it. And it was some months before she could be induced to go again into the forest or pastures, where such things are likely to be.

Girls of entirely different natures often make the strongest of friends, and Alma never thought of chiding Edith for what seemed to her silliness, except in the most gentle way. Gerald saw the difference in their natures, and treated them accordingly. He liked one, as far as he ever thought about it, just as well as he did the other. Both of them liked him, and when absent he often furnished the subject for their conversations. When he graduated at the High School and went away to college both of them found for the first time how great a place he had occupied in their lives.

They were only fourteen then, and neither had ever dreamed of what is called "love." Gerald was the dearest friend that either of them had, outside of their own families, and they missed him severely. It was a happy day when each ran to tell the other

that she had received the first letter from him, for he had written to both by exactly the same mail, on the second day after his arrival at the university. They met about half way between their residences, out of breath and with smiles irradiating their faces.

"I've got a letter!" cried Alma, holding up the envelope in evidence.

"So've I!"

"But mine's from Ge—"

"So's mine!"

Plumping themselves down under the nearest shade tree the girls read their epistles aloud to each other, hardly able to wait in their eagerness till the words could be enunciated. There could be no secrets between them, least of all over this matter, in which they had a common joy.

He told of his room and his room-mate—a young man named Clifford Nelson—of what they had given him for breakfast, dinner and supper at the "Commons," of the personal appearance of the various professors with whom he came in contact. He said that he missed the faces at Jefferson, of his father, of the villagers, and, not least of all, of the little friends whom he had known so long and intimately. Sentences beginning, "You can tell Edith when you meet her," and "Don't forget to say to Alma from me," abounded.

Having read and reread the epistles and commented upon them to their hearts' content, the girls separated, to go to their own rooms and indite speedy answers, quite as fit to be read to all the world as the ones he had sent to them.

Colonel Staples smiled when Edith came into the parlor to read Gerald's letter to him, and said he was

glad that the boy was so pleasantly situated. Mr. Adams made a similar observation when Alma handed him what Gerald had sent to her, for his perusal. They thought to themselves that nothing could be better for a young man in college than the true friendship of such girls, who had been sisters to him for so long. The mothers were equally well satisfied and encouraged a continuation of the correspondence. They liked Gerald and approved of him in every way. It would encourage a taste for writing in their daughters, and so be of benefit to all concerned.

Gerald told his father, in a letter sent in the same mail with these, that he had written to the girls, and John Garston pondered over the matter a good while, uncertain what to do. He had rather not have had it so, and yet he could give no reason even to his own mind for this feeling. The result of his deliberations was that he would say nothing about it. He realized that it might be something like making a mountain out of a molehill to forbid his son to continue the letters. He believed that the new connections Gerald would make at the university would be likely to crowd these infantile attachments to one side in short order—that they would, in fact, take care of themselves, if left alone. He was gratified, as he frequently had had occasion to be, with the ingenuousness which made Gerald confide everything to him, and he feared to inaugurate a policy which might make him liable to resort to double dealing.

It was not easy for Mr. Garston to spare the money necessary to give his son this higher education, but if it had taken his last penny, if it had compelled him to live on bread and water to accomplish it, he

was determined that Gerald should be "a gentleman." All the pride he had went into this account. The ill luck that he expected, that he almost courted, seemed to follow all of his farming operations. He had poorer crops than his fellow-townsmen, though his land was naturally as good as any. He always sold his grain at the minimum price, and paid ruinous interest on notes. He had no hope of ever getting himself free from these obligations, but if Gerald could be made "a gentleman," could be raised above the heads of the Adamses by education and profession, that would compensate for all the rest.

He had never intimated to his son that money was so scarce with him. The boy had not the least idea that the sum needed to pay the first quarter of his college expenses was borrowed of a Shylock, by a mortgage on what live-stock and machinery was already exempt from similar process, on which interest was to be paid at the rate of four per cent. a month. He went into college with all the bright hopes of youth, provided with a sufficiency of pocket money for his needs, and with only one instruction from his father, to live as well as the rest.

The first time he came home, to spend the short Christmas vacation, it was hard to tell which of the three families laid the most claim to him. He had to accept invitations to dinner at both the Adams and Staples households, and at each of them Alma and Edith were included in the list of those who sat around the board. John Garston was invited also, but as the requests for his presence came together, he felt obliged to refuse both of them. He would have liked well enough to dine with Colonel Staples' family, but he had no idea of stepping inside the stately



home of Alvah Adams. He could not go to one and decline the other without attracting unpleasant notice, and so he made an excuse to both of lack of time, and previous engagements.

Gerald was pumped dry for accounts of his life in college, though he declared that he had told everything in his frequent letters to Edith and Alma. His room-mate, Clifford Nelson, figured in all his experiences, and was described as such a likeable chap that Colonel Staples and Mr. Adams both gave him a cordial invitation to bring his friend with him the next time he came. This reminded him that he had a photograph of Clifford in his pocket, which he produced and passed around the table. The girls were agreed in praise of his appearance and hoped they should soon have the pleasure of seeing him.

"He's awful nice," said Gerald, "and I shall be glad to bring him, if he will come. I should think he might, in the summer. His folks live in Buffalo, and they are immensely rich."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE GIRL WITH THE ANKLES.

When the summer vacation arrived Gerald did not come home immediately from college. He went with young Nelson to the country place of the latter's family, on the borders of Lake Erie. Both the father and mother of Clifford were dead, and

the establishments which had belonged to them and were now coming to him, were presided over by a maiden aunt for the present. But it was not long before the collegians reached Jefferson, where Nelson was speedily introduced to the young girls of whom he had heard his friend speak, and about whom he had formed so many speculative opinions. Knowing that they were still under sixteen, it had seemed to Clifford very odd that Gerald should find it worth his while to devote so many hours in the month in writing to them. Before he had been in Jefferson a week, however, he learned to take an entirely different view. He admitted to himself that these girls were not at all like the ordinary chits of their age, and that he had never seen two such charming creatures as they turned out to be.

Clifford was not long in deciding that it was Edith who interested him most, but try as he might he could not discover that there was any difference between them in Gerald's favor. If he walked with one of them to-day, in the excursions about the town and vicinity that the entire party began to make, the other one was his closest companion to-morrow. Stranger if possible than this was the fact that neither of the girls evinced any preference to be by Gerald's side, so long as he made one of the quartette. They used Clifford with great consideration, but he was wise enough to comprehend that this was on account of his position. He was Gerald's friend, and that entitled him to their regard.

He could not help wishing that one of them, at least, would care a little more for him on his own account, but perhaps that would come later, if he was circumspect and bided his time. Though only

eighteen, he had a sentimental side, and Edith had made a strong impression upon him. He liked Alma too, very much indeed, and she treated him with a frankness which pleased him. He believed Edith grew the least bit more reserved in his presence, but it might have been due to her instinctive knowledge that he had her most in his thoughts.

He did not wonder that Gerald liked both of these girls, but he was surprised when he insisted that he could discern absolutely no difference in the state of his feelings toward them.

"Now, come," Clifford said to him one day, "there *must* be a difference—perhaps a very slight one, but still enough for you to tell which you like best."

"There isn't," said Gerald, with apparent honesty. "I have known them from babyhood and they are exactly alike to me. But aren't they nice, though? I wouldn't bring every fellow I know here and introduce them to him."

The four were together almost constantly during what was left of the vacation. They took rides into the country, went for pond lilies in the wooded lake that Mr. Adams owned, about a mile from his residence, strolled among the ravines and sat chatting or singing on the verandas of the Staples or Adams mansions, indiscriminately, for hours.

When the young men were back in college, Clifford plucked up courage to write to Edith. He said nothing to Gerald of his intention, and there was nothing in the letter except references to the delightful time he had had in Jefferson, and his hope to come there again when another summer should arrive. Time passed and no answer came,

ill one evening, Gerald looked up from a letter he was perusing to say that Edith sent word that she had received his friend's note, and wished him to thank him for his trouble. This convinced Clifford anew that he was on a very different footing in that young lady's mind from Gerald, and that if he was ever to improve it he must do so in some other way than by beginning an unsolicited correspondence.

Just for amusement, and to make a test, he thought he would try the effect of a letter on Alma. The result was no more flattering to his vanity. All he received was a request to Gerald similar to that contained in the note from Edith.

With vacation time he was again in Jefferson, and now he determined to leave no stone unturned to make an impression upon Miss Edith. He found her taller and lovelier than ever and quite as cordial to him as she had been the previous year. There was an indefinable feeling, however, which he could not help, that he constituted a sort of fifth wheel to the coach, and that the girls would have been much better satisfied to have had Gerald to themselves. He intimated as much to Gerald one day when they were alone, but his friend laughed at what he called his nonsense, and said four in a party made it much nicer for all concerned.

"They like you—both of them," he added, "I know they think it very pleasant to have you here. You must not be so notional, Cliff."

"Did Miss—did either of them—say anything about me?"

"They don't say special things," said Gerald. "It isn't their style. They never, for instance, have said

they like to have *me* here, but I think they do, just the same."

"Oh, *you!*" exclaimed Nelson. "Of course, they want *you*. It wouldn't take a telescope to see that."

"And they want you, too," was the prompt reply. "Don't get any idea in your head that they don't."

About every day the young men were invited to dinner or supper at one of the girls' houses, and generally they accepted. The parents on both sides learned to like Nelson very much, and everything was done to make him enjoy his stay. He tried to cultivate Colonel Staples especially, with a view to the future, for he really got serious sometimes in his thoughts about Edith. His father had been connected with the railroad interest, and it turned out that the Colonel had met him somewhere in other days. All this was very well, but it did not prevent him feeling a twinge as he saw the free and easy manners of Gerald and the bright light that came into Edith's blue eyes as she listened to the most ordinary thing he happened to say.

The summer passed away, and Clifford's position was very little, if any, improved. He did not wish to make what is called "love" to Edith, but he could not see why she should prefer to share in her small part of Gerald to accepting the entire attention of another, which she knew well, he was convinced, that he would be only too glad to give her. When he was back at college again he noticed that letters in the handwriting of both girls came more frequently, if anything, than before. There could be nothing secret in them, or Gerald would not have left them, as he did, unlocked in his drawer, where his room-

mate could have perused them at his leisure had he been so disposed. Clifford had no sister, and up to the time he had met Edith Staples he had thought anything in the nature of close friendship with one of the fair sex about the last thing he should be likely to desire. Now his feelings bordered on the envious.

Gerald had taken a great fancy of late to photographs and engravings, such as adorn the rooms of many other collegians, showing lovely woman in her most bewitching dress and undress, and the walls of the apartment that they occupied in common was now half covered with these products of the camera and the engraver's tool. Clifford used to laugh at the enthusiasm with which he would unveil each new beauty, declaring it superior to any of its predecessors, falling into raptures over an arm, a shoulder or a bust. But he regarded it as a mere ebullition on Gerald's part, and something that might as well be allowed to run its course. Clifford had very correct ideas on most matters, and would have talked seriously to his friend had he discovered anything which he supposed had a really "bad" tendency, but these pictures were too silly to treat as if they were things of importance.

"I have bought the most beautiful photograph this afternoon," Gerald would say as soon as he entered the door. "You cannot imagine how lovely it is !"

Then, as he proceeded to take off the wrapper, Clifford would respond, coolly :

"On the contrary, I can tell you all about it. It is Mlle. Quelque Chose of the Varieties. She is dressed ridiculously low in the neck and her gowa



is looped outrageously high on the side. I have seen its counterpart a hundred times, and they are all as near alike as two peas in a pod."

"You have never seen this one," Gerald would answer, his face aglow. "Look! Was there ever such beauty? Is it not superb? I did not think such arms could grow on a mortal creature! What perfection of outline! What grace of pose! You must be stone not to admire that magnificent figure! I believe you are pretending a lack of interest, just to exasperate me."

"I don't see anything to get interested in," would be the response. "I call it the picture of a bold woman who might have been a laundress a month before some one decked her in that finery. There are just as good arms, I would be willing to wager, among the washerwomen who do up the college linen. Your perfection of outline is all in your vivid imagination. You don't mean seriously to think of placing that execrable thing on the walls of our room? Why, it would give me the nightmare. Toss it into the rubbish, like a good fellow."

Then Gerald would assume an air of injury, and, placing the photograph in a good light, would sit down before it and rail upon the flinty heart that could address such remarks to its beautiful face.

"Forgive me, Mlle. Quelque Chose, if that is your divine name, for bringing you into the presence of this unappreciative Philistine. Fix your clear and sparkling eyes upon your admirer, who would give all he possesses for one glance of love from them. Lift those unapproachable arms and twine them but for one instant about the neck of him who will ever afterward be your slave. Open those cherry lips and

own that you have for me a little of that devotion that I bring to you. You do not speak! Methinks at the sound of my voice you turn your lovely orbs away. Your arms, worthy of a Diana or a Hebe, lie motionless at your side. Is it on account of this iconoclastic wretch that you treat me with such cruel disdain? Say but a word and I will cast him hence, that we may live devoted to each other forever!"

As often as this was repeated, varying only in form with each new picture that took the attention of the young man, Clifford could never help laughing at the ludicrousness of it.

"Tell her, while you are about it," he would say, "that you were quite as enthusiastic over the charms of Mlle. Ceci and Mlle. Cela, whose counterfeit presentments still adorn your walls; that you pledged to each of them, representing not less than three or four hundred individuals, the same everlasting love and faithfulness that you now offer to her. Tell her that to-morrow, at precisely this hour, you will bring home the likeness of some other peasant girl who has exchanged a doubtful quality of virtue for a place on the Parisian stage, and rave over it with equal fervor. Oh, Gerald, I am getting ashamed of you!"

Then Gerald would laugh with him, but would protest, for all that, that the picture was a beauty, and that if he were not as blind as a bat and as callous as a block of marble, he would know it. Three days later he would bring home another, declaring that this was more lovely than any that had preceded it, and the farce would be re-enacted with little variation.

"Is there anything in this shop that you do ad-

pire?" he asked Clifford once, as they stood together in the art store of the college town.

"Yes," replied Nelson, "there are several things. These views of the Acropolis, this one of the Colosseum, this of the—"

"Oh, bah!" broke in Gerald. "I mean of things feminine. What are those horrid old ruins good for? A man of sense should be above that sort of thing. What I want is for you to tell me candidly whether there is one of these photographs or engravings designed to portray female beauty that you would think worth purchasing."

Nelson turned to the engravings and looked them over for several minutes.

"Yes," he said, finally.

"Which ones?"

"These."

He indicated two female figures, one a complete nude and the other stripped to the waist.

"Impossible!" cried Gerald. "You are too much of a prude. Why don't you answer me honestly?"

"I mean just what I say," said Nelson. "I would hang either of these in my room, and I would much prefer them to any of the French actresses you have covered the walls with."

"But," said Gerald, with an air of bewilderment, "they are not—clothed."

"Not with manufactured garments, it is true," replied Nelson, slowly, "but with purity and grace beyond doubt, something that cannot be said of most of yours which I have criticised. Clothes do not, of necessity, give an air of purity to woman. Here is a nude and a half nude, and yet the artists have so idealized their subjects that no evil thought

could arise from the contemplation of the unveiled charms. This one has Innocence written on her forehead. This has Repentance on hers. It does not need a key to tell the story of either. One has never sinned ; the other has been purified by suffering. I will show that I mean what I say by buying both of them, for I am sure I could make no better use of my money."

Gerald was astounded. He had never heard such words from his friend's lips, and he felt that there was truth in them. The incident opened up to him a new vein of thought. The next time he contemplated the rows of photographs that he had so much admired they seemed cheap and tawdry. The engravings that Nelson had hung by their side, neatly framed, seemed to shame them out of countenance. It was marvelous that a picture of a woman without a vestige of clothing and another with her garments fallen to her hips could make others in the ordinary costumes of the variety stage look half obscene by contrast. He began to have an increased estimate of the mental powers of his friend, and yet he had dwelt too long on his own conceptions to have his views radically changed in a moment.

The effect of the purchase of the two engravings and of their being placed in proximity to the photographs was to discourage the purchase of any more of the latter specimens, but soon Gerald found himself growing interested in the living women with whom he came in contact. Instead of bringing home specimens of the art of the photographer, he took to relating the charms of various girls whom he met, and Clifford thought the change not entirely one of improvement. So long as Gerald contented

himself with admiring these creatures at a distance there was, however, little harm to be apprehended. Another thing was noticeable. None of the women of whom he used to bring accounts possessed in herself more than one or two of the perfections that he thought ought to be expected in a physical paragon.

One day he would go wild over a pair of eyes that he had seen. Another day it would be a neck, again a waist, again a chin or a hand. He developed a fondness for even the attire which they wore, and fell in love with a bonnet, a sleeve or a skirt, as the case might be. He would become quite exasperated at Nelson for his unappreciation of these things, and declare him an old foggy who was buried in his books so deep that he could not see anything outside their covers.

"What do you suppose it was this time?" he cried, with extraordinary enthusiasm, one evening, as he returned from a walk. "I never saw anything so dainty in all my life!"

"Oh, an ankle, probably," was the disheartening reply.

"An ankle! two of them!" exclaimed Gerald. "A tiny boot, white skirts trimmed with lace, and then the ankles, all getting into a carriage at the depot. I would not have let them out of my sight, if there had been any reasonable way to follow them. There was a man with her, of course, but he could have been got rid of, I suppose. Oh, was there ever such confounded luck!"

Nelson beamed upon him with mild protest.

"How can you be so silly?" he asked. "Ankles are all alike, varying only with the height or weight

of the person who owns them. There is absolutely nothing pretty about them, novelists and poets to the contrary notwithstanding. An ankle consists of a certain number of bones, a little cartilage, some cuticle, some—"

"But these ankles were made of no such prosaic material," interrupted Gerald, impatiently. "You should have seen them, Cliff. My head is in a whirl now, and it is over half an hour since they vanished."

"What a paragon of loveliness you would have, if you would only get all the beautiful limbs, bodies, busts, ankles and the rest into one form. Somehow there always seems to be something lacking whenever you discover one attribute of perfection. I'll wager that this girl's face was not in proportionately wonderful beauty to those remarkable ankles."

"I never looked at it," was the reply. "I hadn't time. I was crossing the street at the station when the ankles became visible. The sheen of the skirts and lace smote me across the brain like a ray from a burning glass. The man who accompanied the ankles sprang into the carriage after her, and the driver started away. I do think the girl looked at me, but I am not certain. I care nothing for her face, except that it might serve as a means of identification, and now, unhappily, I have nothing. No! I never shall see those ankles again!"

Nelson left the room, and a moment later there was a knock at the door. On opening it, Gerald found Colonel Staples and Edith at the entrance.

"It *was* you that we saw at the station," cried Edith, noting his costume. "I told papa I could not be mistaken. How is it possible that you did not recognize us?"



"At the station? Just a little while ago?" he stammered.

"Why, yes, the very last train."

"I was there, but I did not recognize anybody that I knew," he said, feeling as if he was going to faint.

The Colonel shook hands heartily with him and explained that as they had happened to be in the neighborhood, they thought a call would be in order. As Edith was getting into a carriage at the depot she had declared that Gerald had just passed the corner, but he had told her she must be mistaken, for he would have been certain to have seen them. He laughed over the matter, and enjoyed the mortification of Gerald, which of course he did not at all understand. Clifford returned at the juncture, and the usual formalities followed.

"Alma sends her regards," said Edith presently. "Our only regret was that she could not come with us."

"And how is she?"

"As well as can be. I think she never looked better. I am growing very proud of her. She weighs—how much do you suppose?—a hundred and ten! I weigh nearly a hundred myself."

Gerald was regaining his composure.

"You would be heavier to carry over brooks than you used," he smiled. "Still I think I could manage it. I am very strong since I have taken the gymnastics here."

"Did you know," said Edith, "that Alma and I are going to a seminary in the autumn?"

"No!"

"But we are. Papa thinks it would be nice, and

**Mr. Adams** says Alma may go if I do. Of course, one of us couldn't go anywhere without the other. We finish the year at the Jefferson Academy in June, and in September I think we shall go to boarding-school. What do you think of it?"

Gerald was thoughtful for a few minutes.

"I am going to Chicago to study law in an office," he said, "and I know of a young ladies' seminary there that would be just the thing for you. If you decide to go to one, why not take that school? Then we could all be near together."

Edith turned to her father with an eager countenance, the joy of which was not lost on the observant Nelson.

"That would be splendid!" she exclaimed.

"That would be splendid!" echoed Colonel Staples.

It was clear that Gerald's opinion went far with both of them. But Clifford had seen enough at Jefferson to know that it went quite as far with Mr. Adams and Alma.

Colonel Staples took a survey of the walls of the room, during the brief pauses in the conversation.

"You have quite a collection of pictures here," he remarked dryly to Nelson, and the young man knew by the tone he used that he did not approve of them. Edith realized instinctively that there was something not quite pleasing to him in what he spoke of, and consequently did not carry her gaze to the objects under discussion. There was only a second for Gerald to make up his mind what to do, but it was enough.

"Most of them are mine, sir," he said.

"Some are very finely executed," responded the

Colonel apologetically, knowing that there had been an objectionable quality in the tone which he had first used, and wishing to efface the unpleasant effect. "These two engravings"—he pointed to those of the nude figures—"are fit for any parlor in the land."

"Do you think so?" asked Gerald, calmly. "Those are Cliff's."

Colonel Staples got out of it as best he could. He asked Nelson where he had purchased them, and said he should certainly stop at that shop and leave an order for a pair to be sent to his residence. After a little longer the visitors went away.

"You were very kind," said Clifford, warmly, when he was alone again with his friend.

"How?"

"About the pictures."

"I could not have done less. He didn't like them, though, I could feel that. Confound them! I have a notion to put them all in the stove!"

Nelson did not answer. Gerald broke the silence presently.

"You remember the girl with the ankles?"

"Yes."

"*It was she!*"

Clifford was too petrified to form a reply.

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## CHAPTER V.

"WE HAVE MADE A VOW."

Gerald was twenty-one when he came back to Jefferson with his diploma in his hand and exhibited to

his father with much pride the evidence that he was a bachelor of arts.

With hardly less satisfaction he took out his parchment at the residences of the Stapleses and Adamses. The Colonel was pleased to find that he had not merely skimmed the sea of knowledge, but had gone down into the roots of things and laid the foundation for a future that would be of genuine use to him.

"And now you are going to study law," he said. "What induced you to do that?"

"I thought it an honorable profession," replied Gerald, "and one that would be likely to bring a fair share of reward for the labor expended."

"You can make it an honorable one, as far as you are concerned; but the majority of lawyers are sharpers. Of course, you will be different," laughed the Colonel. "And you will make a bee-line for the bench."

"I have hardly thought of that," said Gerald, with a blush. "I expect to have a hard time at the beginning, but I mean to work my way."

Edith came into the room as they were talking. For a wonder, Alma was not with her, but she already had her bonnet on and was going to Mr. Adams' house as soon as Gerald was ready. They had both been invited there to tea.

"What do you think of this young man's idea of being a lawyer?" asked her father, placing an arm around her waist and drawing her to him.

"I think he ought to make a good one," she said, smiling upon the object of the inquiry.

The father toyed with one of the dainty hands, which he had taken in his own.

"Do you think he would have influence with a

jury?" he asked. "If women ever get the right to vote, as some of them are trying to, and you are drawn on a jury, and Gerald is counsel in a case, do you think he will affect you by his argument?"

The girl laughed at the humor of the widely drawn conceit.

"I hope the time will never come when women vote in Iowa," she answered, "and I'm sure it would be perfectly dreadful to have to sit on a jury. As for Gerald's plea, I hope I should be influenced by it, if it was on the side of right and justice."

Colonel Staples laughed aloud.

"I see you do not understand the law business," said he. "It matters little to a lawyer where the right and justice of a case is. He is there to win a verdict for his client, and that is all he cares about."

But Gerald interposed.

"Speaking for myself, sir, I should not take a case unless I believed it in the interest of right."

Then the Colonel laughed again.

"You would easily convince yourself of that when a good retainer was placed in your hand. But I am keeping you from your engagement, and we shall have to dismiss the matter for the present."

He rose as if to leave them, but Edith did not let him go. With one hand still clasped in his, she stood with him before the young man.

"You would not take the part of the wrong against the right, merely because you were paid for it, would you, Gerald?"

"Pshaw, pet!" exclaimed her father. "You must not take me too seriously. Gerald would be as honorable as is possible for one of the profession to be, I have not the slightest doubt."

**She took the young man's sleeve in her clasp and spoke with feeling.**

**"Never the part of the wrong against the right, never the side of the strong against the weak! Tell him, Gerald, that you would never do that, no matter what the inducement."**

**"You do not understand," said the Colonel, still trying to make a joke out of the matter, "that the right and the weak have little with which to pay fees to lawyers. If Gerald is to go into this thing with the notion of making a living, he will have to do as the others do."**

**She clasped tighter the sleeve that she held, and refused to consider the matter a light one.**

**"Tell him, Gerald."**

**"She is right," he answered, moved by her earnestness. "There must be an honorable way of earning a livelihood at the bar. That way I shall endeavor to follow."**

**"Of course you will," said Colonel Staples, heartily. "The idea, Edith, of your taking my little joke so seriously! Come, you must be going, or you will keep Mr. Adams' table waiting."**

**As they walked along the road toward the farmer's, Edith said, "You must forgive me, Gerald. I could not bear that any one should intimate, even in jest, that you could ever do a dishonorable thing. If there is no other way to practice law, I hope you will adopt some other profession while there is yet time."**

**He assured her of the rectitude of his intentions, and long before they reached their destination they had changed the subject for one more agreeable.**

**Alma was watching on the veranda, and ran to**



meet them. She threw both arms about Edith's neck, as though she had not seen her for a month, though it was scarcely two hours since they had parted, and gave her hand warmly to Gerald.

The girls were at this period eighteen years of age, and the promise of their earlier days had been amply fulfilled. The one reminded you of a lily, the other of a blush rose nearing maturity. Edith was still the taller and slenderer, Alma the rounder of outline and fuller of chest. Alma had a dark beauty, sensuous and warm. Edith was a trifle more dignified and stately, but without the suspicion of airiness, in the unpleasant sense in which the word is often used. Jefferson debated the question daily, as it had for the past five years, and could never come to a decision which was the lovelier. On one point the entire village was agreed, however, and that was that two finer girls could not be found in the county or State. Neither of them had an enemy and surely neither of them deserved one.

Naturally enough Mr. Adams began to talk of Gerald's future prospects, when the party were seated at the table, and the subject of the law as a profession was soon again under discussion.

"I wish you were ready to begin practice now," he said, "for I could give you enough to occupy your time for awhile. This matter of my mill power is causing me some trouble. The people up stream complain because the water overflows upon their land at some seasons of the year. The whole batch of them have joined in a suit against me, and I shall have to defend it. It would have made a good beginning for a young attorney to get hold of a case like this, and I am sorry, both for your sake and my

own that you have not already been admitted to the bar."

Gerald looked pleased at the compliment implied, but Edith could not help asking the question which was uppermost in her mind.

"Who has the *right* of the matter, Mr. Adams?"

The farmer looked at his questioner with some surprise.

"Why, I, of course," he answered.

"Then why do these men seek to annoy you?"

"They would like to get a few thousand dollars out of me if they could, that's all. You see when I decided that I started my mill I bought up the rights of the abutters on this stream clear up to its source. For a long distance through the prairie it hasn't much headway, and when I fill the reservoir it sometimes makes the water flow over the land for a good distance back. That was to be expected, as anybody could have told them."

"But *did* anybody tell them?" pursued the questioner.

Mr. Adams grew slightly uneasy.

"I don't know as anybody did. I didn't, I'm sure. Men are supposed to know some things. When I bought their rights they knew it was for the purpose of securing the water for my mill, and that I should have to build my reservoir accordingly. If there is double the water I need at certain seasons it is very natural to expect that it will overflow."

Edith would not be dissuaded from her inquiries.

"And this overflow water injures the land?"

"Very likely. But what did I pay for? I handed over two thousand dollars to those fellows, and for what? I didn't take a foot of their territory away

from them. They can water their cattle in the brook and wash their wagons there, and carry water to their houses to use, as well as they ever could. I paid for the privilege of using the water for a mill, and to keep any one else from locating above me, and I say it's a shame for them to band together and hire a lawyer to compel me to pay for the same thing twice."

Mrs. Adams and Alma listened with interest, and it was evident that their sympathies were with the speaker.

"I don't know much about law," said Edith, and she was so taken up with the subject at issue that she quite neglected her meal. "But a case of this kind seems to me one of simple right. Either you have the privilege of stopping up this brook so that it will run upon the premises of your neighbors, or you have not. If you have, they are very wrong to cause you expense, and they will lose their case when it comes to the court. If you have not, you ought to pay them whatever is just."

Mr. Adams was astonished to hear this logic evolved from the young brain, and he did not know the reason that had made Edith all at once so profound a student of equity. He might have been angry had these same remarks come from another source, but Edith was to him almost like another daughter, and he wanted to justify himself in her eyes for the course he had taken.

"If these fellows had come to me in any fair way, Edith, and said that they thought I was exceeding my right in letting the water overflow, I should feel very different about it. But the first thing I heard of the case was a note from Lawyer Cass, of Des

Moines, a man I despise, telling me that unless I paid a certain sum in so many days he should enter suit. No one likes to be bulldozed, and I told him to go ahead and sue. I can spend as much money as they can, and I think they will find it out before they are through with me."

Edith nodded.

"No doubt you can, Mr. Adams. Would it not be better to find out who is in the right and let that govern the decision now, instead of after a great deal of money has been wasted by both of you in litigation?"

Her cheeks shone with an unaccustomed color, for she knew that what she was saying might savor of impertinence.

"You would not give the lawyers any chance to live at all," he said, smiling for the first time. "Imagine yourself in that business, and I came to you in this case, what would you do?"

"I would tell you just what I have, and then I would charge you a good round sum for my advice."

Everybody at the table laughed now, and harmony, which had apparently been threatened for a few moments, was fully restored. Mr. Adams said seriously that he did not know but he should carry out the plan suggested, as it certainly had elements of good sense in it, though the parties to the suit had exasperated him somewhat by their method of summary procedure.

"When you get to practicing, Gerald," he said, jocosely, "you had better offer Edith a position as partner in your concern."

"I shall be only too glad to do that," said the

young man, relieved that the dispute had had so happy an ending.

"You will have to take me, too, then," put in Alma, with a roguish smile. "Edie and I are never to be separated. We have made a vow to live together all our lives, haven't we, Edie, dear?"

Gerald laughed at that, and said he should certainly take them both, and Mrs. Adams, who was not much of a talker, interrupted to suggest that the party were neglecting the supper, which was something she could not permit. They then devoted their attention to the edibles, and the remarks that were made took on a lighter tone, until a very pleasant evening had been passed.

When the hour arrived for separation, Edith reminded Gerald that he had promised her mother to see her to her door. Alma thereupon declared that it would be too bad for him to return alone, as he must pass her house on his way to his own, and ran to get her hat to accompany them. Edith thanked her warmly for the thought, and the trio went up the road together.

"I have had a splendid evening," said Edith, when she reached her door. "I hope your father didn't think me saucy for saying so much about the mill-water, but I got more interested in the matter than I could give any reason for. I wish you would put in a word, too, Alma. I cannot bear to think of neighbors going to law when there is any way to prevent it."

"Oh, papa will do as he likes," said Alma. "And I don't know as I quite agree with you in this case, Edie. They have been very aggravating, and he paid them what everybody said was too much in the

first place. I hate to see men trying to get money out of another just because he has been successful. It would serve them right not to give them a penny, and a lawyer that papa has seen tells him they can never get anything if they fight till doomsday."

Edith looked worried.

"I don't pretend to know anything about it," she answered, "but if it were my case, I would settle it the simplest way. Well, good night."

The girls embraced each other, and Edith's hand was extended to Gerald with her usual heartiness.

"You'll be over in the morning, of course," called Alma.

"Yes, and I want you here in the afternoon, you know."

"All right."

Gerald and Alma strolled back toward their homes with no greater evidence of affection than when the party numbered three.

"What do you think of that mill matter?" she asked him suddenly, leaving another subject to come back to this one.

"There are two sides to it," he answered, vaguely.

"But which is the best? Do you entirely agree with Edith?"

He had unquestionably done so when she was speaking to Mr. Adams. It seemed to him then that there was no other way that ought to be thought of. Now that Alma's tone implied a variance of opinion, he had grave doubts.

"Ought any one to allow themselves to be imposed upon?" asked Alma, not giving him time to speak. "Is it the duty of a man who knows he is in the right, to pay out a sum of money for the benefit



of others, just to avoid standing up in a court and defending himself against them?"

"Not in that view of the matter, certainly," he answered. Then he added, diplomatically, "I am sure your father will consider the case from all sides, and do what he thinks just."

Alma grew as earnest as Edith had done.

"It is not exactly that," she said. "He has paid them once, and a good round sum, too, for what was no loss to them whatever. Now they have gone to work and sued him for much more. It was no doings of his—they have entered on it of their own accord. It seems to me that he ought, in the interest of others who may be imposed upon in that way, at other times, to teach them that this sort of thing does not pay those who engage in it."

Gerald admitted that there was something in that. He wondered, at the same time, what answer he would have been able to make had both the girls been present.

"Do you imagine I would renounce any right that belonged to me, because some one tried to rob me of it?" she asked, looking at him with the air of a young princess. "Never! Neither, I believe, will my father, when he comes to think it over."

They were at her gate, and it occurred to him for the first time what a queenly figure she had become. Her handsome head was beautifully set upon a neck of surpassing loveliness, and her round bosom gave her a pose at once persuasive and commanding. He had not dreamed in all his life of offering her a more warm salute than a pressure of the hand, but into his brain there came the swift thought that strawberries were to be gathered on

those ripe lips, never yet touched by lover. The half moon poured its light through the trees upon them. Neither spoke for some moments, but she knew that his eyes had seen something never revealed before, and her heart gave a throb quite new to its maiden pulsations.

"I shall see you to-morrow," she said, breaking the stillness from very necessity.

"Yes, sometime. I have promised to devote a little of each day to reading law, so as to put myself ahead when I get to Chicago. But I will come over afterward."

They exchanged good nights, and he walked the few steps that took him to his door with the strangest feelings he had ever had. His head was hot and there was a commotion in all his arteries.

He only exchanged a word with his father, who had sat up to wait for him. He wanted to get to his own room, where he could be alone.

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## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **"WHY, YOU LOVE THEM BOTH."**

Alvah Adams thought a good deal over the suggestion that Edith had made in reference to the mill-stream claims, and convinced himself that she had a good deal of right on her side. He was not naturally belligerent, and would much rather exchange pleasant words with any person than cross ones. There were only a dozen parties or so to the suit which had been brought against him, and he con-

cluded to send some one to them individually to ascertain what sum would satisfy each in case he should decide to settle the matter.

It was not wise for him to go, because they would then have a chance to quote his offers should negotiations fail. Some outsider must do the work, and he naturally thought of employing one of the lawyers of the village. But he knew both of these legal luminaries very well and he had not the greatest confidence in them. Of one he doubted the ability and he had fears of the other's integrity.

It suddenly occurred to him to ask Gerald. The young man was unversed in the ways of business, to be sure, but it was a very simple thing he would have to do. A little tact, a smoothing over of any animosities that had been developed, and an appeal to their common sense was all that was needed, and Gerald could do this as well as an older and more experienced person. Besides, it would be a good thing for him, as a prelude to the profession he was about to adopt. Yes, he would offer him the work.

Gerald was a little startled when the proposition was made to him. He feared that it was beyond his powers to undertake the reconciliation of elements already so far divided. He knew enough of human nature to see that the task was a very different one at the present stage from what it would have been before ill feeling had become so large an ingredient. He would have to meet men who not only felt themselves entitled to damages for the actual trespass they had sustained, but who had been injured in their pride by words that naturally follow strained relations. They had doubtless had conferences together in their aggrieved state and had resolved

to do everything in their power to defeat their opponent.

He said to Mr. Adams, while he was flattered by being selected for this undertaking, he feared he could not enter upon it with sufficient confidence. He thought some older and more experienced person would be better to engage. Mr. Adams replied that he was willing to run all the risks himself, and that he would not hold him at all responsible in the event of failure.

"You can see these men, at least," said he, "and report to me the mood they are in. It may be that I shall be compelled to go to law, after all. But before anything more is done in that line I want to give them a chance to get out of it. What Edith said the other evening made a great impression upon me. I have never wittingly wronged any person and I do not wish to begin. I would rather suffer a small loss than inflict one. As she says, if I owe them anything, or even if they honestly believe I do, it will make me feel better to pay it than to inaugurate hates and jealousies. You are going to be a lawyer, and you will have plenty of similar cases in your time. Here is a good one to begin on. I shall pay you what you think right for your trouble, and it will be worth a good deal to you as a bit of experience beside."

Gerald answered promptly that he should not think of accepting compensation, in any event. He wanted a day or two, at any rate, to think it over, and to this Mr. Adams agreed.

During the days that followed Gerald saw Edith and Alma frequently, and with both of them the conversation drifted more than once to the question

of the damages claimed by the abutters on the mill-stream. As the girls knew that they could not agree in their opinions upon this subject it was never brought up when they were together, but when he was alone with either it always seemed to come to the surface. He mentioned to Edith in confidence, the first time he met her, that Mr. Adams had invited him to undertake the task of arranging the trouble, and she heard the tidings with the utmost delight.

"I am so glad!" she exclaimed. "You will arrange everything, I am sure, and these old friends will not be converted into mortal enemies. Let me congratulate you, Gerald, that your first essay in legal work is in so good a cause!"

"I have not promised to undertake it yet," he answered, taken aback by the unmerited praise which she showered upon him. "I am a little doubtful whether some one else would not have a better chance of success."

She looked disappointed but not discouraged.

"Go about it with a determination to succeed, and that will be half the battle," she replied. "How much pleasanter will be your task to offer these people an olive-branch than if you had to send them a challenge to war. If you decline this opportunity, girl as I am, I think I shall go to Mr. Adams and volunteer myself."

When he left her he was almost positive that he should accept the offer. There seemed but one view of his duty. He imagined the men meeting his overtures with a friendly spirit, and naming ridiculously small sums as the amounts that would satisfy them. His confidence rose to a great height, and had he

met the mill-owner at that moment he would have embraced his proposition without another word. But an hour later he met Alma.

"I wonder if father has decided what to do about those men who are suing him," she said. "He will make the mistake of his life if he gives them a sou. Let him once get the reputation of being so easily imposed upon and he will be the prey of all the adventurers in the State. There are times when charity of this sort for a batch of harpies is misplaced. And the attorney they have engaged, too! A man without a particle of decency in his dealings! They ought to be ashamed, every one of them!"

The fabric that had been builded by the arguments of Edith tumbled to the earth in a formless heap.

"I must tell you something, Alma," said he, uneasily. "Your father has asked me to go to these men and attempt a settlement with them."

"But you are not going," she answered, anxiously

"If I do not, he will send some one else."

"That does not excuse you," she replied, with spirit. "If you show him, as you are able to do, how foolish such a proceeding would be, you can change his mind. I think it your duty to do that, before he puts himself in the hands of this crowd who would take him by the throat like a pack of garroters."

"Why do not *you* say something to him?" he asked nervously. "You would have more influence than any one else."

"Not in a matter of business. Father thinks a great deal of me, and would do anything I asked where I myself was concerned, but in such a case as this he would pay no more attention to my opinion than if I were an infant in arms. I am in his eyes



‘only a girl,’ but you—you are a man! What you say, he will take at its true value. Try him, Gerald, and if you cannot dissuade him from this suicidal course, at least be able to remind him afterwards that you advised against it.”

He wished with all his heart that he could say to her then and there that he would do as she wished. But what could he tell Edith, who had understood, he was sure, when they parted, that he would give advice quite the opposite, and even undertake the mission in person.

“I shall have to think about it,” was all he was able to say.

Whenever he met one of them or the other their conflicting arguments on this subject almost distracted him. He was not used to having any matter so muddled in his brain. He could decide anything he had ever had to consider up to this time, with the quickness of a flash. It was the high esteem in which he held them both that confused his mind. He could not bear to offend either, and the merits of the case were quite hidden in the affection with which he regarded the fair disputants. If he had cared one jot more for one than the other, that jot would have sufficed. While each of them held identically the same place in his heart there was nothing to do but continue in uncertainty.

When a week had passed Mr. Adams became importunate for his answer, telling him that it would seem a simple matter to say yes or no, and that he wanted to engage some other agent in case he should positively decline. Gerald begged for a few more days to consider it, and though the farmer

thought it very strange, he consented with reluctance to give him till the following Wednesday.

Monday morning Clifford Nelson came to Jefferson unannounced, and went at once to Mr. Garston's. Gerald had been hoping to have his company during some part of the vacation season, but had not known just when he would arrive. He welcomed him now, not only for the pleasure of seeing him, but because he thought his friend might be able to find some way for him out of his dilemma. As soon as the ordinary topics were discussed sufficiently he threw himself upon his good graces and told him exactly the position in which he stood.

Clifford was much entertained by the recital. He did not care a rap for the troubles of the farmers whose lands had been overflowed, or the threatened suit which hung over the head of Mr. Adams, but the subject of Gerald and the girls was of the keenest interest. He cared more and more for Edith, and only waited to make sure that he could do so honorably, to endeavor to make her understand his sentiments. He listened to Gerald's statements, and made up his mind to side with her if the chance fell in his way, and also to let her know that his influence had been cast in that direction.

"I do not see how you can hesitate, if the case is as you put it," he said, when Gerald had finished his long story. "Mr. Adams has decided to make the attempt to satisfy these people outside of a courthouse, and all you could say would not be likely to alter his intention. Miss Edith thinks he is right in trying to do this, and so do I. Miss Alma, on the other hand, holds a contrary opinion, but it is in the interest of her own father, and at his

request, that you are to undertake the work of pacification. It is clearly two-thirds one way, if not more. You must tell him at once that you will accept the work, and lose no time in going about it. If you succeed, you get a large feather in your cap. If you fail, he will remember that it was himself who urged you to the step. As far as Miss Alma is concerned, she cannot long blame you for doing what her father asks."

Gerald did not seem as thoroughly convinced as his friend evidently thought he should be.

"You do not know Alma," he replied. "She has a will of her own, and her father thinking the other way has no effect at all on her opinion."

"Then why do you not refuse, and have done with it?" asked Clifford.

"Because Edith has urged me so strongly to accept. I do not think I count Mr. Adams in the matter at all. If the girls were agreed I should know very well what course to pursue."

Clifford sat for a minute watching the clouded face before him and could not help acknowledging that by all external signs the matter was troubling his friend very much indeed.

"If it is only a question of pleasing the young ladies," he said, finally, "the solution to your problem is not so difficult. Take the side of the one for whom you care the most."

He trembled inwardly when he had made this proposition, for he dreaded to hear Gerald say that this course would compel him to adopt Edith's proposal.

"You do not understand my feelings toward these girls," replied Gerald. "I care just as much for one

of them as the other. There is absolutely not the slightest difference."

Clifford determined to push the questioning now that the time seemed so opportune.

"This cannot go on forever, my dear boy," said he. "The time must come when you will have to choose between them."

"*Why?*"

Gerald looked at his friend, comprehended his meaning, and turned a fiery red.

"No, no! It is nothing of that kind!" he exclaimed. "We are friends—only friends—that is all, indeed it is!"

"Have a little sense, Gerald," replied Clifford, earnestly. "You were all children once, but you are so no longer. You are now twenty-one and they are each eighteen. You are a man, and they are women. If you look into that heart of yours you will find that you entertain a deeper passion for one of them, and it is something of which you have no need to be ashamed, either."

Gerald protested, still with the reddest of countenances, that it was not true, that Clifford did not understand his feelings at all, and that nothing like love had ever entered into his sentiments toward either of these girls or from either of them toward him. They were only friends of a very close kind, companions,—brother and sister,—nothing more, he assured him. But Clifford would not be convinced.

"Let me put a few tests to you," said he. "Would you like to know that some man had gained Alma Adam's promise to marry him?"

The color left Gerald's face.

"No!" he cried in pain.

"Or that Edith Staples—"

"I beg you—say no more!" cried the young man, excitedly.

Clifford felt his heart chilling.

"Why, you love them both!" he ejaculated. "Instead of caring for them merely as friends, you love them both!"

Knowing nothing of the sentiment that had developed in Nelson's mind in regard to Edith, Gerald thought only of his own state, so suddenly and violently revealed to him.

"God help me!" he said, with shaking voice. "I am afraid I do!"

The listener could not help being affected by the despair in the tones of the speaker, and there was little in the situation to encourage his own hope. But he strove manfully to do the right thing.

"Don't be so downhearted," he said, tenderly.

"It is a good thing that you have discovered this in time. You know that there must be a choice sometime, and you will gain the strength to make it."



## CHAPTER VII.

### EXAMINING THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

It is not easy to permanently depress the heart of a healthy young man of twenty-one. The very force of the feelings which overpowered Gerald made it the easier for him to recover from his despondency. He had found no way out to his dilemma, but he had gained courage to await the issue. It was some-

thing to have Clifford there. If his college chum could not invent a way to help him, it would at least show that other heads were no wiser than his own.

"Confound Adams and his mill!" he burst out the next day, when they were talking about it. "I don't care a fig for anything in this matter except the disagreeableness of having to disappoint one of the girls. I wonder how they came to take such an interest in the question. It is not at all like them, and there was no reason why they should trouble themselves with a matter that belongs exclusively to men. Of course it was the natural sweetness of her sunny disposition that made Edith protest against anything like a quarrel, but she need not have been so set about it. And Alma, too. She ought to think that her father may have an idea or two of his own worth considering."

Mr. Adams had sent word that he would like to have Clifford inspect his mill with him, and when he had gone on that errand Gerald walked up the road toward the village and met Alma and Edith coming toward him, with their arms around each other's waists. How bright and happy they both seemed! How much brighter grew the expression in their faces when they saw that he was near them! Had he not passed half the night in lamenting the condition of things it would have made him down-hearted to note this, but he had nerved himself for something better.

"We are going to Alma's," said Edith, as soon as he reached them. "Won't you come back with us?"

"I am going to the post-office," he answered, "but I shall be back before long. I wish," he added, "that you would come to some compromise in the



matter of the mill-stream damages. I should like to please you both. Otherwise"—here he drew himself up and tried to assume an air of importance—"I shall have to decide against one of you."

The girls stood before him, with their hands clasped together, and he thought neither had ever looked so lovely as at that moment.

"Whichever way you decide," said Edith gently, "be sure not to imperil that neighborly good feeling that ought to reign between people who own adjacent estates. Leave no bitterness to work out revenges, no one knows to what extent, when years of real or fancied wrong have passed."

"And be sure," said Alma, "that you do not assist in the swindling of one of the fairest of men, by those to whom he has already paid more than their just deserts. Do not come to a decision that will prevent others from bringing improvements here, to raise the price of every bushel of grain grown in this section."

The girls had drawn nearer together as they spoke, and one of them now rested her cheek against that of the other.

"The thing must be settled somewhere," he said, desperately, "either in court or out of it."

"Yes," said Alma. "But I should think more of a man who was robbed by highwaymen after the most desperate resistance than one who handed them his purse at the first bidding."

"My father gave orders to his servants many years ago," said Edith, "to give a meal to every beggar who asked for it. He said there might be one deserving applicant in a hundred, and that he would

prefer to feed the ninety-nine to refusing the hundredth man."

Gerald looked from one to the other in despair.

"All this does not help me any!" he protested. "If two girls like you, who love each other with the devotion of sisters, cannot agree on the matter, how can you wonder that a dozen farmers, with no tie of friendship in particular, have no better success?"

"But the case you are trying to decide is merely one of common business. These men do not wish anything of my father but his money. There is nothing concerned but dollars and cents."

This from Alma, with the clearest of countenances.

"There is a little more than that, it seems to me, Alma, dear," said Edith. "There is a difference of judgment as to whether money is due. Would it not be better to reconcile those differences out of court, if possible?"

"What are courts for?" responded the other. "When it gets there a jury of twelve men will hear the evidence, perhaps inspect the premises, and aided by the advice of the judge, will render a decision. I do not see how there can be a fairer way. There would be nothing disgraceful in paying an amount so estimated, while there is something very like submitting to blackmail in paying anything now."

They might have talked till doomsday in this vein and never have been any nearer to reconciling their views. Feeling that this was true, Gerald turned the conversation.

"Cliff Nelson came last night," said he. "He is staying at my house."

Neither seemed to take special interest in this bit of news, in itself, but Edith evidently voiced the double regret when she said :

"We shall see less than ever of you now, I fear."

"Than ever?" he repeated, with a smile. "You see me every day, and you will continue to do so. The only difference will be that I shall sometime bring Cliff with me. I am glad he is here, as we are to study law together and shall be of assistance to each other. I might get him to help me in the mill case," he added, as if the thought had just occurred to him.

Neither of the girls made any response. They wanted him to decide for himself, and each was confident that he would see the right as she saw it if he only gave it thought enough. They did not fancy having a new element brought in. Which-ever way an umpire might decide it would be against one of them, and neither liked to risk that.

On his way back from the village Gerald met Clifford, who had just finished his visit to the mill, and as they passed the Adams' gate the girls came down to the road, having espied them from their perch on the veranda. They exchanged greetings with Clifford in a quiet way. Gerald wanted to talk longer with Alma, thinking that if he could get her to surrender a little of her position his task would be easier, and he proposed a walk through the woods. The girls assented and Clifford found himself where he most wanted to be, by the side of Miss Staples.

It was a delightful afternoon. The warmth of July was tempered by a westerly breeze and the sun

was shaded by masses of white clouds, which dispersed the severest of its rays. The paths through the wood led through pleasant nooks, and across little bridges built since the days when Gerald had carried Edith in his arms over the fords. Mr. Adams was the owner of this piece of ground, and though he had left it open to the common use of the people of Jefferson, he had expended considerable money in beautifying it. There was quite a large lake in the interior, where he had built a boat landing, a bath house with a dozen compartments, most of which were free to any one who desired to use them, and other appurtenances that increased the value of the water as a means of recreation. Scattered through the wood were a number of arbors, built in the most rustic fashion and enshrouded by heavy masses of vines. A cottage arranged for the occupancy of himself and family during any part of the heated season, was the most elaborate structure there, and this was surrounded by an enclosure of a half acre or so, shut in by a high board fence, to ensure seclusion. This summer house, which the Adams family had occupied a good deal during the first two or three years after it was erected, was now used only for an occasional night when the mercury took a specially high range.

Clifford purposely loitered, so as not to keep within too easy sound of the voices of his friend and Alma, and Edith courteously responded to all of the commonplaces which he thought it the part of good breeding to utter. Presently, however, he branched into the subject that most interested him.

“Gerald has been telling me about the mill-stream dispute.”

"Ah?" she replied, waiting for him to proceed.

"It is a curious case," he went on. "His only difficulty is his dislike to come to any decision that will be disagreeable either to you or Miss Adams."

She waited a moment and then said that he must, for all that, come to some decision, sooner or later.

"Yes, so I have told him. And I have said further that I wholly agree with you, Miss Staples, in the view that you have taken."

He had a notion that she would show gratification, perhaps overwhelm him with thanks, and he was ready to disclaim any credit for merely advocating what he thought right. But to his surprise she did nothing of the kind. If she was pleased there was nothing in her countenance to indicate it. He fancied that he could, on the contrary, detect dissatisfaction with the information he had given her, and he began to wonder if he had committed an error.

"He asked me my opinion," pursued Clifford, groping blindly in the direction where he supposed there might be light, "and as a friend I could not refuse to give it to him. Now, could I?" he asked, thinking she ought to say something to guide him before he had gone much farther.

"Certainly not."

"He asked me what I should do in a case like this, which he outlined. I said I should try to effect a settlement outside of the courthouse, and if that failed I should, of course, go to a jury and leave it with them; but I should try the pacification plan first. I hope you do not think I was wrong in giving that advice."

"By no means."

He thought that she showed an extraordinary lack of enthusiasm, notwithstanding her apparent agreement with him in the course he had pursued. And he determined to see if he could not say something to arouse her from the lethargy into which she had fallen.

"I cannot say that I succeeded in making Gerald's duty clear to him," he said. "He was still uncertain what he should do when we finished our talk. But I gave him another suggestion, which may assist him when he has thought about it sufficiently. I told him that where one wanted to please two people the only way was to try and please the one he liked best."

He was alarmed at his own temerity, when he had uttered the words, but she did not give any sign of attaching any particular stress to them. Gerald was with Alma, some rods in advance, and Clifford knew that for this moment at least his friend was under the spell of her fascination.

"What do you think of my proposition?" he asked, as she did not reply.

"I can see but one way to decide anything," responded Edith "and that is by the guidance of one's conscience. I think Gerald will decide that way, and whichever course he takes I shall be satisfied."

He could see that the couple in advance had paused and were waiting for them, and he quickened his steps.

"You have never been into the summer-house, I believe?" said Gerald to Clifford. "Alma has the keys with her, and we will inspect the place if you wish."



Clifford said he should like it very much and the party proceeded to the main gate of the enclosure, which was fastened by a padlock, a little rusty from exposure to the weather. She tried to turn the key, but it stuck in the lock and Clifford took the task upon himself, with better results. Once inside the grounds he expressed his admiration for everything in no stinted terms.

There was nothing very elaborate or expensive, either in the summer-house or its adornments, but he had not expected so much comfort and taste as was everywhere displayed. It was a perfect bijou of a place, arranged under the personal supervision of Mrs. Adams, and bore a certain resemblance to the southern type of similar edifices which she had known in her childhood. There was everywhere an air of refreshing coolness, and Clifford thought he had never seen a place more inviting to rest and comfort during the season for which it was designed. The house was quite extensive, having not less than twelve rooms, and the kitchen was placed in the smallest building at a little distance, in which were also quarters for servants.

"It is delightful!" he exclaimed. "Why is it that you have not already put it to use this year?"

"Mamma is not as well as she used to be," explained Alma, "and we have not occupied it much for several seasons. I must send Mary Carson down and have it put in order. We generally have a few lunches here some time in the summer, and father and I have usually slept here some of the warmest nights."

"I tell you what, Cliff," said Gerald, "this would be just the place for us to come and study in, while

Mr. Adams' family is not using it. I am going to inquire what price he will ask."

Alma laughed at the word "price."

"You need not go to father for that," she said. "I will give you the key, as soon as the house is in order, and you can come here all you like. If we happen to want it for a day or two I can let you know."

"And the expense," put in Clifford, not contented for long unless he could make some allusion to the subject on his mind, "Gerald can deduct from the bill when he has arranged terms with the abutters on the mill-stream."

Gerald looked annoyed. Alma and Edith turned to examine one of the windows, where there was a pane of broken glass for which they could not account. Clifford saw that he had "put his foot in it," but he did not know how to extricate it.

"Let me tell you all my idea of the way to arrange this thing," said he, and the girls assumed an air of attention. "I will propose to Mr. Adams to go with Gerald and talk with these men—sound them, as the saying is. It will do no harm for us to go and see them, in a sort of unofficial way, and report how we find things. If they are tractable, I should say settle. If they are bound to fight, then the blame will be on them."

Gerald looked at the girls to see what reply they had to make to this proposal, which commended itself to him for two reasons. It seemed to show a way to solve the difficulty, by conceding a little to each side; and it gave him a companion on his errand, which he very much wanted to have. Nei-

ther of the girls spoke for a moment, and then it was Edith who broke silence.

"I think," she said, addressing her remark to Alma, "that we had best leave further discussion of this affair to the gentlemen. You have a strong opinion as to which way is right. I have one equally strong. I am willing to allow them to go on uninfluenced—so far as I might have any influence—by any further argument of mine."

Alma assented to the proposition.

"You know what I think," she said to Gerald, "as well as if I were to repeat it a thousand times. I shall be glad to adopt Edith's idea, and drop the matter from our conversations hereafter."

Clifford thought they had dropped him along with their discussions, for he did not seem to enter into their considerations at all. His vanity was hurt, for he was accustomed to a good deal of deference in the society which he met at home, being a young gentleman of family and fortune, whom most people of his circle thought it worth while to cultivate. Gerald looked from one of the girls to the other, with the feeling of a man deserted on a lonely island by those whom he has esteemed his friends, and who sees them pulling at the oars which take their boats further and further from him. He saw no feasible way to escape, however, and tried to think that the new aspect of affairs had its advantages. He changed to Edith's side, as the party strolled homeward, leaving Alma to Clifford from a notion of propriety, but none of them managed to get into a very gay mood before parting.

"I've got to rely on you now, old boy," said Ger-

ald, when they were in their room at his father's. "If you desert me I am ruined."

"I shall not desert you," replied Clifford. "But we must go about this thing without another day's delay. We must have a talk with Mr. Adams early in the morning and start off before noon."

To Gerald this seemed like hurrying matters, but his friend was inexorable.

"If it's to be done, let's get it out of the way," said he. "Time enough has been wasted already."

"Alma will be much disappointed," mused Gerald.

"And Edith proportionately gratified," replied his friend, watching him narrowly.

"And I wanted so much to please both!"

"That has been proved impossible. Now you must choose, as I told you yesterday."

Gerald looked up oddly.

"How do you know I want to choose that way?" he inquired.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A TRIP UP THE RIVER.

Clifford led off in the conversation with Mr. Adams the next morning. He led off, also, in securing a horse and wagon with which to make the trip up stream, for it was necessary to follow a country road which led to most of the farmers' houses, and it seemed useless to make so much of a journey on foot. Gerald was dispirited when he found that the

die was actually cast, and could think of nothing but the objections that Alma had raised. He would have given anything in reason to have got out of the whole matter with credit, and wished heartily that Mr. Adams had never thought of his name in connection with his tangled affairs.

His companion, on the other hand, had concluded that there might be something of credit to himself in a settlement of the case. Although Edith had received with such coolness his announcement of his intention to join in it, he knew that he was doing what she wanted done. Every hour that passed found him with a greater affection for the fair girl than the preceding. He saw that his progress in her good graces must be very slow, but he was willing to wait. At present her whole heart appeared to be fixed on Gerald. That young gentleman's, however, seemed to Clifford to be inclined a little stronger toward Alma, and this gave him hope. He had chosen Alma on the day preceding for his walk to the woods, and he had substituted Edith for her on the homeward walk, more apparently from motives of policy than from an inclination to abandon his partner. He talked of nothing this morning but the disagreeable effect this errand would have on Alma. Clifford was quite encouraged at the prospects, take them all in all, as he and Gerald rode out of Jefferson.

Gerald agreed readily to let Clifford do most of the talking, and the young man acquitted himself with distinction at the first house they called at. The owner was a man named Estes, who had suffered the largest injury, if there was any, from the overflowing of the reservoir and brook. He seemed to

be a good-natured fellow, and readily consented to leave his work and go over the ground with his callers.

"It's all dry enough now," he said, as they reached the vicinity of the alleged flooding, "but you ought to have seen it in April. I couldn't put in a plow there for a month after I had the rest of the farm finished. All that big piece that is covered with late crops was as wet as a sponge. The banks of the brook are low in spots all along its course, and the least rise raises the deuce."

"How long have you had the place?" asked Clifford.

"I took it up the same year he did."

The "he" referred evidently to Mr. Adams.

"Did it never overflow before he built his dam?"

"Well," leaning heavily on one leg. "I wouldn't want to say *never*; not every year, as it does now, I'll be bound."

"It has overflowed each year since then, has it?"

"Yes, sir, every one, and I've got proof of it."

"Excuse me, Mr. Estes," said Clifford, "but why did you not seek damages sooner?"

Mr. Estes shifted his weight to the other leg.

"The fact is," he answered, "that I wanted to be neighborly and not trouble any one if I could help it. I spoke to Alvah—" everybody in Jefferson seemed privileged to call Mr. Adams by his first name—"and we had some talk about it. But time has gone on and it has kept doing me harm, and he has made a good deal of money out of the mill, and I think he ought to make it right. That is about all there is to it."



Clifford walked around a little, trying to assume an air of wisdom.

"Do you think there is less profit in the crop you have there on that piece than in the grain beyond it?" he ventured.

"Well, I don't know as there is. It takes a good deal more work to raise it than it does corn or wheat, but it brings more in the fall. That ain't the thing, though. I contend that no man has a right to run water over my land without he pays me for the privilege. It ain't for Alvah Adams to say that I must raise this crop or that crop."

Clifford pretended to side with the farmer in his last statement, thinking that this was the best policy, and inquired off-hand how much he thought would make him "square."

"I don't know exactly," said Mr. Estes. "I only want what's right."

"He paid you something for the privilege of using the brook, didn't he?"

"He gave me two hundred dollars for a writing that I would never use it myself for power, or do anything to its waters except take water for my cattle and the house. If it wasn't for that writing I could put up a mill as well as he, and I don't know as it would hurt his power if I did. His idea was, I suppose, that he didn't want any other mill in the valley, and he came along when I was short of money and bought me out at his own price."

"Just as everybody else does in the way of business," commented Clifford. "Now, Mr. Estes, you are an honest and a sensible man, and you think Mr. Adams owes you something. I wish you would tell me how much your claim is, as I would like to have

him settle these matters in a friendly way with his old neighbors, if I can."

Mr. Estes shifted his weight again.

"I've put in a claim for a thousand," he said.

"You might just as easily have made it ten," replied Clifford, "the question is, what amount would recompense you? You don't want, if I understand you correctly, anything but what is right. How much cash in your hand, between now and the first day of August, would satisfy you to execute a quit claim."

Mr. Estes put his hands as far down into his breeches pockets as they would go.

"You see, Mr.—I believe you didn't tell me your name—"

"Mr. Nelson."

"You see, Mr. Nelson, we have made an agreement, we farmers along the brook, not to settle unless we can all settle together. We put our names to a paper that Lawyer Cass drew up. I'm willing, and I've always been willing, to do the fair thing. Alvah could have settled with me almost any way if he had talked right when I first went to him. He kept saying that he had paid me once, and that he didn't think I ought to ask any more, and I got tired of it. But now I shall have to abide by the sense of the others. If he's got any proposal to make, we'll get together and hear it, and I won't be the off horse, neither."

Here was an unexpected obstacle. Clifford had hoped to arrange matters with the complainants, one by one, and now he met a much more formidable opposition. The farmers were to be coached by a lawyer, and no doubt a shrewd one, who would urge

them to get every dollar they could squeeze out of the mill-owner.

"Mr. Adams doesn't admit that he owes you anything," he said, "but for the sake of good feeling and old acquaintance he is willing to make an allowance for the fact that you hold a contrary view. He has no proposition to make, but if he could get reasonable—or half reasonable—figures from you all, he would prefer to draw his checks for a small amount rather than have you spend your money at law. I am going to see the others and talk it over with them, and I hope you will get together and conclude that it is better to come to some agreement in a friendly spirit than to put a lot of your money into the pocket of an outsider."

Mr. Estes dusted a piece of earth from his coat.

"You're going to make the same mistake that Alvah did," he replied. "If you go up the road telling the farmers that he don't claim to owe them anything, you might as well stay at home. They know that he does owe them something, and their lawyer guarantees that he'll get it out of him if they go to a jury."

"I am only giving you all a chance to avoid taking that risk," said Clifford, pleasantly. "'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' you know."

"Well, you go and talk with them, and when you come back, stop here and tell me what they say," said Estes.

"And may I tell them that you will agree to whatever the majority decide?"

"Yes. I ain't no kicker. But you'll find them fellows howling, now I tell you. They're mad clean through, and that's the truth."

Clifford walked slowly back to their buggy, with Gerald, who had not uttered a word, and Mr. Estes accompanied them.

"We shall try to settle this thing, but perhaps it will please these men better if they hear the decision from a court," said Nelson, as he reached the wagon.

"P'raps," responded Mr. Estes, dryly.

When they were on their way again Clifford asked Gerald what he thought of the progress they were making.

"It's a little like that of a crab," said Gerald. "I didn't think the trip would amount to anything. It will give me a chance, though, to say to Edith that we tried."

"But Miss Alma will think, if the verdict goes badly against her father, that it is partly due to our interference."

"I know it," said Gerald, sadly. "Isn't it unfortunate?"

Nothing that he could say, no form in which he could put the query, could turn Gerald from his closely balanced fondness for the two girls, and Clifford heaved a sigh of regret.

"It is indeed unfortunate," he assented, to hide his feelings.

"The only thing in all our lives that ever came between us," exclaimed Gerald. "We have gone on as smoothly as that confounded millpond down there, ever since we were little bits of things till now!"

He spoke in such a depressed tone that Clifford was moved to remark that there was nothing very vital in it all. There had been no quarrel either between the young ladies themselves or between either of them and Gerald.

"*Quarrel!*" echoed Gerald, starting at the word. "*Quarrel!* Why, Cliff, I can feel each pulsation of their hearts! The slightest regret that either of them experiences cuts me like a knife. Our nerves are interwoven. I read their thoughts before they utter them. There can be no quarrel between us that does not end in *death*. The prepared plate of the camera is not so sensitive to the light as the smallest molecule of my brain is to the least variation of theirs."

Nelson grew very sober.

"And as I told you, it must come to an end," he said.

"But how?" cried Gerald, wildly. "I think we are really one, and not three, as we appear to others. We were born in parts, but we have grown together. A blow to one of us hurts all."

"Let me, as an outsider, tell you one thing," said Clifford. "I have watched you. While both Miss Adams and Miss Staples feel a great interest in this matter, it does not affect them anything like the way it does you."

"You do not know," was the instant reply. "They do not confide in you, as I do. Could you read their minds, as I can; could you feel the depression which they experience, sent with double force back to your own heart, you would know that my agitation is not one bit greater than theirs. It is not this thing in itself that troubles me so, but the dread it gives me of the future. I did not know until you opened my eyes how dear they were to me. I have not been myself since this controversy arose, for it has taught me what suffering I am capable of giving by showing what pain I can be made to feel!"

Nelson did not know what to say. It was evident

that his friend felt all that he expressed and more, and he had no wish to add to his discomfort. Luckily they arrived in a few moments at the residence of the next abutter upon the brook, which Gerald pointed out. He had come provided with a list of the men to be seen, and he knew where they all lived, having been familiar with the vicinity from childhood. This man, who rejoiced in the surname of Moon, was even less satisfactory to talk with than Mr. Estes. He did not care to discuss the case, which he had left wholly in the hands of "his attorney." He would not even consent that Mr. Nelson should inspect the place where the stream had overflowed, unless "his attorney" was present. He declared that he had been a big fool to sell his rights in the water to Adams for a hundred and fifty dollars, and he should try not to commit a similar error next time.

"If you want to see Lawyer Cass, you can go to Des Moines," he said. "He's got the whole business in his hands and no one else could settle with you if they wanted to. Alvah Adams can't pull no wool over the eyes of the people up this way. He's got more money than we have, but we've got jest as good a show in a court of justice as him. A Jefferson county jury will say whether he can flood our lands as he likes and refuse to make it right."

"But he doesn't refuse to make it right," protested Clifford. "I am here for the express purpose of asking you to let him pay whatever he owes you."

"He can pay it to Lawyer Cass. Let him send word for him to come down here, and that he's got the money ready, and enough for the expenses that he's put us to, and there'll be no trouble."

Clifford said, with slight sarcasm, that he had no



doubt that was true, but that the figures named in the suit were not reasonable and that no fair-minded man would ask Mr. Adams to settle on any such terms. Seeing, however, that he had an obstinate customer to deal with, he drove on to the next man, whom he found no more tractable.

Before he had completed his round he learned beyond question that Mr. Adams had disgruntled the whole of them, and that they were, in the language of the country, "spoiling for a fight" with him. Most of them had come to the neighborhood about the same time as he, and none had achieved a tithe of his financial success. This seemed to them a favorable opportunity to "even up" matters a little. They had sold out their rights in the mill-stream at nominal figures, and he had made a small fortune, some of them believed a large one, out of it. Lawyer Cass had convinced them that he could "make him sweat," and they were quite willing to assist an attempt to excite the perspiration.

A Mr. Crane, one of the last men whom Nelson interviewed, interjected a new phase into the controversy by saying to Gerald—

"How does your father feel about this, Mr. Garston? If he's ready to settle easy, he's had a great change come over him within a few days."

"My father?" repeated Gerald, with a look of blank astonishment.

"Sartin'ly. When we had our last meetin' with Lawyer Cass, he come along and asked if it was too late for him to jine in. He said his land was overflowed as bad as anybody's, and that he hadn't sold no rights at all in the stream, the way the rest of us had. We was all surprised to know that it run

through his land, but he said it did—that it made the boundary of his quarter section for more'n six rods. He said it was right along the edge and p'raps Alvah hadn't thought that little distance counted for anything. 'But it does count,' says your father, 'and I want to go in with the rest of you on the suit.' Lawyer Cass said that was all right, that there was plenty of time to hitch his name on, and it was done then and there. Well, when we got to talkin' you ought to have heered *him*! I never thought he could speak as flip as he did! He was for takin' the thing through all the courts this side o' Tophet, an' enterin' an appeal arter that, if it didn't go our way. You don't mean to tell me he's backed down so soon? Well, I never!"

Clifford looked at Gerald and saw that he was paler than he had been before, though he had appeared like a sick man all day, and he took it upon himself to answer Mr. Crane.

"I am doing this for Mr. Adams," he said, "and Gerald has only come along to point out to me where the parties live. I think the best thing to do is to let it go to court, as you all seem to wish it, but I assure you that it will cost you pretty dear. You understand farming, Mr. Crane, much better than you do law. But have it as you please. It is all the same to me."

He turned his horse about as he was speaking, and drove back toward Jefferson, leaving a very angry man behind him.

"You didn't know that—about your father?" said Clifford, interrogatively, as soon as he had an opportunity.

"No. It is a terrible surprise. I knew that he and Mr. Adams have not been on the warmest terms for a good while, but I did not think that anything like this could happen. The news is very disagreeable."

"It must be. What was the origin of the trouble between them?"

"I never heard. My father, as you have noticed, is of a secretive nature, and I have never talked with him about his private affairs. I suppose he will think it wrong that I should have undertaken this errand, but I have not spoken a word to anybody, that is one good thing. You must stand by me, Cliff, if he speaks about it. It would have been a bad mess if I had undertaken it alone."

His friend readily promised to present the best phase of the case to Mr. Garston, should there be any need of it, and they drove to Mr. Adams' house to give an account of their trip. It was late, and as they admitted having had no supper, the mill owner urged them to let his wife "put a plate on," although his family had finished their meal some time before.

"Alma is up to Edith's," he said, "but we will do our best to entertain you in her absence."

Mrs. Adams also came out and joined her entreaties to her husband's, but Gerald declined, saying that he must get home as early as possible, for special reasons.

"Well, if you won't, you won't," smiled Alvah. "How did your journey come out?"

"We didn't catch a fish," laughed Clifford. "I thought I would say just that much to-night, and in the morning I will come over and give you full particulars."

"I'm not much disappointed," was the reply. "Couldn't do a thing with them, eh?"

"No, they are bound to fight."

"Let them fight, then," said Mr. Adams. "I'll give them fight enough. They'll find that it's a game that more than one can play at. I've retained Major Noyes, the smartest lawyer in all Iowa. There isn't one of them damaged a penny, and they know it."

It was evident that he was waxing angry as he contemplated the case, and fearing that he would say something which Gerald might think reflected on his father, though they both had reason to believe that Adams did not yet know he was in the list of his opponents, Clifford said good-night and drove on to Mr. Garston's. Here the young men alighted, and one of the farm hands was sent to the livery stable with the buggy.

"Where did you go?" asked Mr. Garston, as he greeted them.

"Up the river," said Gerald, feeling a guilty flush creep over his cheek at the deception of the incomplete answer.

"It's a nice drive," said his father, and there the conversation ended. Mr. Garston was not in the habit of having long talks with his son, nor in fact with any one else.

The young men ate their supper silently and went up stairs.

"More and more trouble," said Gerald sadly, when they were alone. "If Alma's father and mine get into a regular quarrel, what shall *we* do?"

"Become the more attached, as lovers have been since the creation," smiled Clifford. "And then, if

worse comes to worst," he added, with an effort, "there is Edith."

"Don't make a jest of it," said Gerald, a spasm crossing his brow. "It is a serious thing to me."

"Indeed it's no joke to me, either," thought Clifford as a vision of the girl who had become so dear to him flashed through his mind.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### "YOU MUST FIGHT THESE MEN."

When Alvah Adams found that John Garston had joined in the suit against him, which he learned from a gossiping villager, several days after, he became struck with wonder, and then white with rage. He had known for years that John did not feel cordial to him, but had attributed it to jealousy at his greater success, and had never dreamed that it would break out into open hostilities. He had given John his only chance in life, and he had thrown it away in a manner that entitled him to little sympathy from anybody. During the first years when they had been opening up their land, and when both of them had to rise early and go to bed late, Alvah had lent a helping hand to his friend in a hundred ways. He had advanced him funds on many occasions, never stooping to accept the interest which was tendered, though he liked money as well as the next one, and could have lent it to others of the townspeople at five per cent. a month. Even within a year of the present date he

had stood between Garston and his importunate creditors, without letting him know whom his benefactor was. He had done this, not on his account, but to save Gerald the mortification of having to see his home sold under the hammer. But in the exasperated mood which came with this news of the mill-stream matter, Alvah remembered nothing but the fact that he had tried to help John a thousand times, and that this was the sort of repayment which he had received.

As he rode home he met Colonel Staples, and ventilated his grievance.

"What do you think of it, after all I have done to help that man?" he asked, when he had told his story.

The Colonel had heard of the matter before, as it had been common talk for some days in the village, and he admitted it, saying that he had supposed Mr. Adams knew about it all the time.

"They say Crane threw it up to Gerald, that day that he and young Mr. Nelson went up to interview the others," said the Colonel.

"But what does the fellow mean?" exclaimed Adams. "I have lugged him on my back, as you might say, ever since we have been here together. I couldn't make a man of sense of him—the Lord himself couldn't do that—but I have helped him over the rough places and enabled him to keep his farm when the creditors were determined to take it away. I've got an outlawed note of his now, fifteen years old, for five hundred dollars, that he never intends to pay, and that I never expected he would when I lent him the money. I have let him have seed, and tools, and men, and given my word for him at the stores, time



and again. If he thought I owed him anything, why couldn't he come and talk it over with me, instead of joining these rascally fellows and putting me to extra expense and annoyance. My patience has about given out. If he persists in this thing, the mortgagees may sell him out the next time he fails in his interest, for all of me."

Colonel Staples had never seen Mr. Adams in a temper before, and he was surprised that he could get so angry.

"Garston doesn't know half of the kindnesses you have done for him," he ventured to remark. "If some one were to go and tell him of them, in a quiet way—"

"I don't want them to," replied Alvah, reddening. "You know last summer, when you told me that they were bound to advertise his place for sale to satisfy their claims, how I sent a third party to him with an offer of a second mortgage, so that he could pay the interest, and that I furnished the money. I didn't want him to know it then, and I don't now. There was no hope of doing any more than staving off his troubles, for he hasn't gumption enough to get out of the net he has twisted around his neck, but I did hope he could get his boy through his schooling and established in business before the stroke came. Now, I don't much care how soon they take the farm. Nobody could expect me to go down into my pocket again for a man who has turned against me in this way."

The Colonel was plainly uneasy during this tirade.

"You might go and see him," he suggested.

"John Garston will be a good deal older before he

finds me hunting him up,' retorted Adams. "The next time it will be more likely that he will hunt *me* up. His interest will be due in a few weeks now, and we'll see who'll advance it this time."

The friends parted and Adams drove toward his home. Just before he reached his premises he saw Garston coming, and imagined that he detected a trace of malice on his face. His inclination was to pretend not to see him, if he could get into his gate soon enough, but this was impossible. Garston reached the turning off point first, and stopped his horse.

"Is the mill running this morning?" he asked. "I want to take over some grist."

"Of course it's running!" retorted Adams, unable to conceal the anger that filled him. "Did you think a lawsuit for damages was going to stop it?"

Garston received this snappish answer without moving a muscle of his hard face.

"You know *why* it runs, I suppose?" he said. "It is because I allow *my water* to fill the reservoir that turns the wheel."

Alvah smiled contemptuously.

"*Your water!*" he replied, with sarcasm.

"Yes, *mine*. Every drop of it passes my land, and I can cut it off whenever I take the notion. I have let it run there for years in order to be friendly and neighbor-like. But there come times when a man finds it his duty to look out a little for himself."

Alvah's countenance grew dark.

"About when do you think you will cut off this supply?" he inquired, icily.

"I shall consult my own fancy about that."

"And now long do you think you could hold *your land*"—with a strong accent on the 'your'—after you had done it?"

Garston looked at him for an explanation. He evidently did not quite understand his reference.

"It is as well to be plain," said Adams. "If that stream should be cut in the bank which skirts your farm for a few rods, where would the water go? Why, it would flood your wheat fields and stand two feet deep in your corn and garden! Allowing that you had enough spite to sacrifice these, your mortgagees would hardly be willing to see their security thus lessened. The Iowa Investment Company, who hold the first lien, if not the party who holds the second, would foreclose upon you, as they would have a full right to do. I have heard that you have joined in the suit which Lawyer Cass has brought against me. Go on and make all you can, but don't imagine that you have a fool to deal with."

Garston heard him quietly.

"The wheat will soon be harvested," he said. "The corn and the garden crops will follow in a few weeks more. When the crops are out of the ground it will do no harm for a little water to stand on it over the winter. I am not sure but it would benefit it."

Adams was driven to frenzy by this cool proposition.

"Whoever owns the farm which you have been pleased to call *yours* for so long, when winter comes," he said, "will not be likely to entertain your view of what is good for wheat and corn. Third mortgages are not common in Iowa, and I think next time the auctioneer will have his way."

Garston was as cool, outwardly at least, as his companion was furious.

"It will take time to tell that," he replied.

Adams started to retort again, but thought better of it, and being in truth a little ashamed of the temper he had already shown, allowed Garston to depart without saying anything more to him. He threw the reins to a man who came forward as he reached the house, and retired to a shady corner of the broad veranda, where he could think. He was in a profuse perspiration, partly from the state of the weather and partly from the state of his mind, and as he sat there he fanned himself vigorously with his broad straw hat.

"I've got to protect myself," was his thought, "before anything else. That, I've heard, is the first law of nature. The interest on the second mortgage which I hold by proxy will be due in a fortnight. If it is not paid I must take measures to foreclose. But it is probable that he will try and pay that interest, as it is such a small amount, and I may have to wait for the first mortgage owners, the Iowa Investment Company. If they sell the place, I shall have to buy it. Then I should own the only part of the brook in dispute, and be free of that danger forever. It's good land, as good naturally as any of mine. I offered to exchange even with him once, when he said he thought it the poorer of the two, and after consideration he refused. Yes, I must get possession this time. That threat of his compels me."

He looked through the vines that thickly clung to the lattice work of the veranda, and saw a young man coming briskly up the walk. It was Gerald. He walked with a springing step, his cheek was ruddy

and his whole appearance indicated happiness. Gerald could not walk toward the spot where he expected to meet Alma without feeling his heart bounding in his breast and every pulse astir. The things which had been troubling him vanished from his brain when he found himself near her door and knew that the next moment he would be in her presence.

As the mill-owner looked at Gerald, a heavy pain struck through him. Every plan that he could make to circumvent the plot of John Garston would give sorrow to the son. Alvah liked Gerald immensely. He had received him into his home for sixteen years with all the warmth that he could offer. He had gladly allowed him the freest intimacy with his dearly beloved daughter, and felt that their friendship was of an enduring kind. Alvah had never had a word of difference with Alma in his life, and he dreaded doing anything that might cause her to utter a protest. If there were open hostilities between the fathers, what effect might it not have on the children? He thought how easy it would have been for John to come to him in the old way and say that he was in trouble for money and wanted to be helped out again, and how promptly—for Gerald's sake—he would have given him the sum needed. It was a very different case now. John held over him a threat to injure his business in the most wanton manner, and for no good whatever to himself. Adams remarked inwardly that he was not a good man to threaten. John would find that out before he was through with him. Then he thought of Gerald again, and grew doubtful.

**The sound of music came through the open win-**

dows. The young couple were at the piano. Alma's hands were chasing the notes over the keys and their voices blended harmoniously in a song. He could see them dimly through the inner shutters. They acted like attached friends, not like lovers, but he was glad of that. It would be years before Gerald would be in a position to take a bride, and it was much better that they were content to await the approach of that time before passing the bounds of friendship. He knew that they thought themselves unobserved at the present moment, and that there was no bar on their perfect freedom of manner except the natural one of their own choice. Gerald turned the leaves of the printed music, sang his part with her to the end, and then they talked together as he had seen them do a hundred times, as if there were nothing in the world to disturb the full current of their pleasure. After a few minutes they left the room and he heard them on the lawn in the rear of the house.

What was he to do? How could he reconcile the protection of his interests with the happiness of this young man, whom he esteemed so highly, and whom he expected one day to call son? It was no easy problem, and he failed to find an answer that satisfied him.

Gerald stayed but an hour longer, and Alma came searching for her father, one of the servants having told her that he had been seen to go out upon the veranda. She laughed brightly when she found him, saying that he could not hide like that from her, and asked how long he had been playing dormouse. When he told her that he had been entranced



with the singing that he had heard in the music-room she laughed more brightly yet.

"But you are sober, papa dear," she said, seeing that he did not share her mood. "I know what it is—those horrible mill-stream fellows. You have not been yourself since they began to annoy you. I would rather you shut down the mill to-morrow than to have it make you so much trouble."

She put her arms tenderly about his neck and he thought that there were some things in life that made it worth living.

"Perhaps I shall conclude to do it," he said, musingly.

"What, papa?"

"Shut down the mill, my pet."

"Oh, I don't mean that. You must fight these men, as a matter of principle. If it were only dollars and cents, that would be quite another thing."

He reached up and took her hands in his, looking at the rings she wore. Some day there would be another there, with a brilliant stone in it; and some other day—long might it be in coming!—still another of plain gold.

"Supposing, pet," he said, "that there should turn out some morning not to be enough water in the reservoir to run the mill. Supposing the stream should run dry?"

"Not much danger of that, I guess," she smiled, "after all the rains we had this spring."

He felt so secure, with those arms about his neck, that he thought he might as well give her an inkling of the truth.

"There is a small part of this stream, Alma, that borders the land of another man. The line that

divides my estate from his runs through the center for several rods. He has a legal right, for all that I can see, to cut through the bank on his side and let off the water. That would effectually stop the mill-wheel."

"And spoil his farm!" she laughed. "He would not be such a dunce, whoever he is, as to do that. There is no way in which it could benefit him."

Alma peered over into her father's face for the light that she thought her logic would bring, but she saw that he did not think the matter a simple one, and she left her place at the back of his chair and brought a stool to his knee.

"Who is this man who has it in his power to make my papa so sober?" she asked. "I will go and talk with him, and show him how little pleasure it is to cut off one's nose to spite his face."

"It is John Garston, Alma."

Her smile faded then like a flash.

"Gerald's father!"

"That's it, exactly. If it was plain John Garston, and not 'Gerald's father,' I should not be long in knowing what to do."

Somehow, though there was a hopeless tone in his voice, she was glad to hear him say this.

"You like Gerald, papa, don't you?"

"Yes, Alma. And you?"

"Very, very much."

Plain, honest, outspoken girl as she had always been, even at a moment when most girls would have thought it a part of maidenly modesty to cast down their eyes and call up a blush, she met his gaze unflinchingly.

"What shall we do about it, pet?"

"Has he really threatened to cut the bank?"

"He has told me that he could. He has insinuated it."

"But with what object?"

"That is more than I can tell," answered her father. "John has been growing colder to me every year for a long time. I have never injured him, unless it be in accumulating money faster than he could, and Heaven knows I have never wronged a man out of a penny. He seems to be jealous of my greater success, and there is nothing so unreasoning as jealousy."

Alma relapsed into deep thought for some moments. When she raised her head again, it was with this query :

"Is there any way that you could prevent him, if you chose?"

"Yes." He was surprised at the way he was confiding in her, for he had never before told her anything of business matters. "He is heavily in debt. The men whom he owes have long been prevented with difficulty from taking his land. It is probable that they will take it this year, and offer it for sale. I could buy it."

It was evident that these forms were not very familiar to the girl, for she asked to have them explained more fully. When she understood the legal aspect of the case she said :

"If you did not buy the farm some one else would?"

"Yes."

"What would Mr. Garston,—and—and Gerald—do, then? Where would they live?"

"I do not know. I should be glad to let John stay

where he is—for the sake of Gerald—but I fear he would be too angry and too proud to accept the favor. I should want nothing except to secure the mill-stream from injury. There is a great deal of profit in the mill, my dear, and I should not like to have it stopped."

Alma thought again for a little while.

"It is so contemptible of him to propose it!" she exclaimed, finally. "It is like going into somebody's garden and cutting down their fruit trees. I would not submit to it!"

"What shall I do?"

"You must stop him!"

"In what way. See, I am asking your advice."

"In *any* way. In *every* way. You *must* stop him."

He leaned over her.

"Even if I have to take the house over his head?"

"Yes."

"And Gerald's?"

He had never imagined the quality that was in her, that made her look him straight in the eye and answer "yes" again.

"You will wait," she added, "till you are sure he intends to carry out his threat, and then you will act. Gerald will not blame you, if he has a right idea of the matter. He is not at all like his father. He could not do a mean thing. He would never claim that you ought to allow any one to inflict a wanton injury on you without retaliating."

Alvah Adams loved Alma more at that minute than he had ever done, and he had not supposed his love capable of increase.

"My child," he said, "I care more for you than for the mill—more than for fifty mills, more than for all

my other possessions. I would do anything rather than imperil your happiness. Think well of this and tell me your opinion, later."

He kissed her and she went away slowly.

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## CHAPTER X.

"BUT THAT IS A SERIOUS THING."

Colonel Staples had been thinking a good deal of late about the subject of the pecuniary difficulties of John Garston. He cared no more for that individual, considered alone, than did Alvah Adams, but as the father of one for whom he entertained the greatest affection, and for whom his daughter felt something that could hardly be described by anything less than a tenderer name, he thought he ought to do whatever lay in his power to postpone the unpleasant day when importunate creditors would demand their rights. He had no doubt that after Gerald entered into the practice of his profession he would find a way to relieve his parent of the difficulties which crowded upon him. To allow the avalanche to precipitate itself across his path at the present time would result in no one could tell what annoyances. Upon leaving Mr. Adams that morning when they met in the road and talked the matter over, the Colonel made up his mind that he would offer assistance to Garston the first time he met him.

Garston knew well that his affairs were in a very precarious state. But so they had been for years,

and yet he had always managed to escape foreclosure at the last moment. He had more than once seen the interest day approach until its shadow cast a black cloud over his heart, and yet something had always happened to save him before the fatal blow was delivered. The year previous, three days after the Iowa Investment Company had given him notice that they should push their rights, a stranger giving the name of Bufford had called to ask if he would like to execute a second mortgage, at the ordinary rate of interest—a thing unknown in that latitude—and the money thus obtained had sufficed to put off his importunate creditors for another year. Now both the interest on the first and second mortgages were coming due, and the principal of the latter as well. He had hoped to save something toward payment, but with Gerald's college expenses and some losses in various directions his plans had gone wrong. He had less than four hundred dollars on hand, with a thousand due on the principal, and half as much as interest, and with everything he owned, from his farm down to the smallest animal or tool upon it, mortgaged to their full value. He had no idea from what source relief could come, but he had a blind confidence that it would come from somewhere. And in this blind confidence he rested when he entered into the suit against Adams and threatened to cut off the mill-water as soon as his crops were out of the ground.

Of course John had no idea that the stranger named Bufford was really the representative of Mr. Adams, and the money which he advanced on the precarious security of a second mortgage came from the solid bank account of his prosperous neighbor,



Perhaps if he had known it his pride would have been too strong to allow of its acceptance, even though it was the only thing that could save him from total financial ruin.

The Bufford mortgage gave a power of sale, as did all mortgages at that date in Iowa, within a short time of any defalcation in the payment of interest or principal. With this document in the village bank, Adams waited for the day when it would be available. He had never wanted to make John trouble, and had lent the money with the feeling that it was pretty much the same thing as throwing it away ; but the sinister expressions in reference to the mill-stream had proved too much for his good nature.

He was considerably surprised, therefore, to receive word from the agent Bufford one day in August, that the note covering the second mortgage had been paid in full with interest, and that the amount was awaiting his order. Adams was more than surprised, he was annoyed. He wondered who beside himself had been reckless enough to advance money on that sort of security. He went and told Alma what he had learned, as soon as he could find her.

"It leaves me entirely at his mercy," he said. "He will do what he threatened now. There is no doubt about it."

"Simply from ugliness !" she exclaimed. "How can any man have such a disposition. Well, it relieves us of the other question, at least. He will have to bear all the moral responsibility."

"And much it will trouble him !" he answered, grimly. "There is one thing left that I could per-

haps do. I could see the agent of the Investment Company which has the other mortgage and ascertain if they wish to sell it. Were it not for Gerald, my course would be plain enough."

Mr. Adams happened to see Mr. Grosschen shortly afterward, and in response to the question whether the company had any mortgages which they wished to dispose of, received the reply that it was against the policy of the company to sell mortgages. They had an implied contract with their customers that only the usual proceedings would be taken.

"As long as the interest is kept up," he said, "we let the principal stand. When there is a default we sell at auction, according to law. We never do anything else."

"Supposing," said Mr. Adams, "that you had a mortgagor who should flood his land to spite a neighbor and thus reduce its producing and selling value?"

"I can't imagine such a case," was the reply, "but I do not think we should do anything about it so long as the interest was paid. We are not fond of interfering in minor matters with our mortgagors."

There seemed to be no outlet in this direction, and Adams returned home with a greater puzzle than ever on his mind.

Colonel Staples, who had known that the Bufford mortgage was really the property of Adams, was troubled over the part he felt obliged to play in the affair, principally because it compelled him to enter into a sort of deception of his old friend. Like Adams he had not wanted Garston to know from what source his assistance came, and had engaged an outsider to transact the business. The first time he

met Adams he had a mortal fear that he would allude to the case, and dreaded lest he should ask him if he knew who this man Davidson was who had taken up the mortgage. The Colonel did not mean to reveal his own part in the transaction, and neither did he like to tell even a white lie to conceal it.

But, to his great relief, Alvah never alluded to the matter in any way. Things went on quietly until one day, early in September, when some one in the village asked him if he had heard that Garston was boasting that the Adams mill would shut down before the next snow came. Finding that this statement had really been made by Garston, Colonel Staples thought it his duty to have a talk with him. He had not meant that his kindness to one neighbor should result in the injury of another, and had thought John's talk in the summer mere idle words without any meaning behind them.

John did not prove very communicative, when the Colonel approached him. To the statement that "people said" he had threatened to stop the mill, he answered that people said a good many things. When he was pressed to make an explicit denial he made the retort that he hoped he had a right to do as he liked with his own, and that it was something about which he would not allow any one to dictate.

"Wouldn't you be willing to sell that part of your farm by which the river runs?" suggested Colonel Staples. "That would settle the matter once for all."

"I haven't got any land to sell, and I am not worrying about settling anything," said Garston. "Let those who've got things to worry about do the

fretting. Alvah says I am all mortgaged up and shall be sold out soon. I don't owe anybody any interest that's due, and I shall do as I like. When he's got anything to say to me let him come and say it and not send third parties."

The Colonel made haste to assure him that he had come of his own accord, just in the interest of harmony between neighbors.

"There can be no harmony between Alvah Adams and me," replied Garston, quietly. "Things have gone too far for that. I don't need any of your counsel, as I have been of age for several years. All you could say wouldn't alter anything, and we might as well drop it where it is."

Colonel Staples wore such a thoughtful face when he reached home that Edith, who ran to meet him, inquired anxiously what was the matter.

"A little business, darling," he replied, "that I tried to arrange has gone wrong. It is nothing that should trouble you, at least. I wanted to make two old friends who have fallen out happy again, and I failed. That's all."

"But that is a serious thing!" said Edith, thoughtfully, as she took a chair by his side. "If two friends have fallen out and become two enemies instead, and you could not reconcile them, I do not wonder that you are sober. Tell me all about it, that I may understand it fully. I am very much interested."

He looked at her for a moment and then concluded that he would partly comply with her request.

"Oh, it is that old matter of the mill-stream."

"Which Gerald tried to settle?"

"No, another branch of the same difficulty, which Gerald would have much less chance of settling even than the other. His father has threatened to cut the bank of the stream where it borders on his land, and cut off the supply of water which turns Mr. Adams' millwheel."

Edith evinced the greatest astonishment at this information.

"Why should he wish to injure Mr. Adams?" she asked.

Her father told her all he thought wise about the matter, but it gave no explanation to the query she had propounded. He did not care to go as far back as the marriage of Alma's mother.

"I am foolish to tell my Edith this," he said, in conclusion. "There is no reason why her head should be filled with such things."

"I am glad to know," she answered, "though I am sorry that it has occurred. The worst thing is that it may cause trouble between Gerald and Alma. Not that I imagine it could separate them," she added, quickly, mistaking the slight start that her father gave, "but it will annoy them both to know that there is a serious difficulty between their parents. I can hardly conceive of anything more unpleasant, when people are as intimate as they are."

Colonel Staples was much disturbed.

"Do you think, then, that there is such a deep attachment between Gerald and Alma?" he asked, nervously.

She looked up as if she could hardly comprehend that she heard aright.

"Why, of course there is! Have you not noticed

it, ever since they were little children—ever since we were all children together?"

"But I thought," he stammered, "that *you* cared for him."

Again she surveyed his face with a long stare.

"And so I do! We are all the dearest of friends—Gerald, Alma and I. If the trouble was between Mr. Garston and you, don't you think I should feel it deeply? Alma will find it very hard to bear, and whatever hurts her hurts me also."

"And what hurts Gerald hurts you both?"

He had an idea that this thought would arouse her to a sense of the position in which she stood, but it did not. She only answered, "Exactly," seeming to think that settled everything.

"Do you think," he asked, presently, "that Gerald likes Alma more than he does you?"

"Oh, no, I am sure he doesn't," she responded, brightly.

"Or you more than Alma?"

She wondered at his persistency.

"Perhaps—a little," she said, musingly. "It is very nearly alike, I guess. But—it may be—he likes me a *little* the best."

The Colonel drew a sigh of relief.

"I will tell you something more," he said. "Mr. Garston is, and has for a long time been, in financial straights. He gave security on his farm for money borrowed and the mortgagee was ready to sell it to enforce his claim. I heard of the danger and through a third party—so as not to let my name appear—I advanced the amount needed."

Edith sprang up and would have embraced him, but he held her off with his hands.



"You think it was from sheer goodness of heart that I did that, but you are mistaken. I only did it for your sake. I did it because it would have injured the future of Gerald to have the place sold, and because I thought you cared so much for him that it would pain you."

Edith still tried to put her arms about him.

"Why do you refuse to let me show my gratitude?" she said. "There is no way in which you could have earned it better."

"Let me tell you first the name of the creditor who held the note which I redeemed. It was Alvah Adams."

The girl was so lost in wonder that she dropped her arms to her side.

"Do you mean that he would have taken Gerald's house from over his head?"

"To prevent Mr. Garston's destruction of the mill-power—yes. It was a case where he would have thought it right. It is a very unhappy affair, Edith, and it is likely to put me into a most unpleasant situation. Should Mr. Garston attempt to carry out his plan there is but one person in the world who could stop him, and that person is myself."

The Colonel waited a moment to collect his thoughts and then proceeded.

"If the river is allowed to overflow upon Mr. Garston's land it will inevitably injure it seriously for farming for a long time. Thus it will lessen the value of the security of the mortgage which I hold. I could undoubtedly procure an injunction from the court which would prevent him carrying out his scheme. But to do this I should have to show him

that I am the real owner of the mortgage. It would not be strictly honest for my agent to go to the court and say that it was his property at stake. There would be affidavits to subscribe that could only be signed by the real person interested. If I obtain this injunction I can save the power to Mr. Adams' mill ; but at the same time I shall doubtless incur the enmity of Mr. Garston, and that may make a rupture between us that will result in trouble for Gerald and you. Now you see, my child, why I came home to day with a cloud on my face."

Edith did see it, and she sat a long time in silence thinking the matter over. In the case of the farmers who wanted damages she had concluded at once that right was right, and that no question of expediency ought to be allowed to enter into the discussion. Now that she found that Gerald's happiness—which meant in a peculiar degree her own—was involved, she wanted a little time for consideration.

"I will go and talk to Mr. Garston," she said, at last. "He need not know that you have told me of your visit to him, and certainly I shall say nothing about the secret you have committed to me. But he has always liked me, from the earliest time I can remember, and never meets me in the street without stopping, which for a man of his reserved habits means a good deal. I will go and talk with him about the brook, and perhaps I shall have a better effect than an older and wiser head. Gerald is at Buffalo with Mr. Nelson, so he will not be in the way."

Colonel Staples did not exactly like this plan, but he saw no real reason why he should refuse to give his consent to it.

At this moment Edith discerned a familiar figure coming up the walk.

"There is Alma!" she cried, in a low tone of delight. "How I wish I could confide this to her! It is the only secret I ever had that she could not share."

"But she must not share this one," he answered, decidedly. "I have told you with the understanding that you will confide in no one."

Alma came upon the veranda where they were sitting, and in their invariable fashion the girls embraced each other warmly.

"I had a letter from Gerald this morning!" said Edith.

"And so did I!" cried Alma. Then they both laughed heartily.

Colonel Staples rose and excusing himself, walked into his library and shut the door.

"Gerald ought not to keep on writing so often to Alma," he mused. "But after all, there is plenty of time—plenty of time."



## CHAPTER XI.

### IN THE UPPER BERTH.

Gerald was still away on his visit to Clifford Nelson, when Edith Staples set out on her errand of conciliation to his father. It was a lovely morning, late in August, and lovelier than the morning was Edith, as she tripped along, happy in her youth, happy in the thought of her good intentions, serene with the serenity of one who has no real ache of

heart or worryment of mind. Every person whom she met addressed her with a cheery "good-morning," for there was no man, woman or child in all Jefferson that ever failed to give this welcome to one who always received it with a pleased nod and smile in return. Her father might have more of this world's goods than had some of theirs, but neither he nor she ever showed that they considered this a matter to stand between them and courtesy to their neighbors of whatever grade.

Surly as was John Garston with the world in general, he also relaxed when he saw her bright face, and he gave her what he now gave to few, his outstretched hand.

"Good-morning, Miss Edith."

It was not a very long sentence, but she knew that she was welcome, and this was as much as she had hoped for.

"I see you have begun your threshing," she said, thinking this as good a way to begin as any. "You have had a good crop this year, if I am any judge."

"Very fair."

It was all he said, but from him it was encouraging.

"I heard from Gerald a few days ago. He tells me that he will be home again in another week."

"Yes, he's coming."

"And then," said Edith, "we shall all be off together. Don't you think it will make quite a vacancy in Jefferson when we all three go at once—Alma, Gerald and I?"

Whatever he thought about it he did not express in words; but at the mention of Alma's name his brow darkened a little.

"You know what friends we have all been since we were little children," pursued Edith, "and it will be very pleasant for us to finish our education so near together as we shall be at Chicago. We are so glad over it that I fear we do not realize how unhappy it will make our parents, especially Alma's and mine, for Gerald has been off already a good deal, and you must have got somewhat used to it. I hope nothing will ever happen that will separate us, for we should not know what to do without each other."

He knew now what had brought her there, and it did not please him. But he liked Edith too well to wish to injure her feelings and so he waited.

She went back to the crops again, remarking that the corn was looking finely, but she did not make much progress in the direction she sought. At last Mr. Garston brought the matter to a crisis.

"Let us come to the point, Miss Edith. You did not come here to talk to me about the corn."

She looked up, rather alarmed to have the fact so plainly stated.

"You came here to talk about an affair that concerns two business men. Now, I like you—like you better than any girl in Jefferson—but I can't talk about that matter with any one."

"But," she protested, "when you think of Gerald and Alma—"

"I do *not* think of Gerald and Alma!" he retorted, with the least sign of anger. "I hope I shall never have to couple those names in my thoughts. They are names that cannot be joined, in that or any other way. They have been friends as children, but it is time even that ended. My son will not con-

tinue an acquaintance with his father's enemy after he understands the situation, which I shall make him do the next time he comes home."

Edith grew pale at the force of his language, uttered with a vehemence quite foreign to his usual nature as she had known it.

"You would not separate them," she gasped. "You would not forbid him to see her!"

"I would—I will," he answered. "He is nearly twenty-two. The fancy of the boy must give way to the common sense of the man. I have hesitated to speak to him about it, believing that he would learn wisdom of his own accord, and believing, beside, that he had fixed his affections elsewhere. But—"

He stopped, for the girl showed extreme agitation, and the word, "Elsewhere?" came faintly from her lips like an echo of his own. She had feared for the moment she knew not what. It sounded as if Gerald had another love of whom she had never heard.

"You understand me, Miss Edith," said Garston, resuming. "I have seen the friendship of you three, and I have believed—I still believe—that it is not toward Alma that Gerald's dearest thoughts have turned. If I have been mistaken," he added, hastily, as she essayed to interrupt him, "I shall take action at once. If I am right, nothing that he could do would make me happier."

Edith was powerfully affected by these expressions, the more so as she was totally unprepared for them. It was extremely grateful to find that this hard man entertained such kindly feelings toward herself, and that he thought her worthy of the son



whom he loved with the only warm spot in his being. But a sense of disloyalty to Alma overpowered these sentiments, and she hastened to reply :

"I think you are in error, Mr. Garston. If you forbid him to see Alma you will give all of us great grief, for it will sever a bond that has become dearer than you can imagine. You say that you like me. For my sake, then, if for no other reason, give up this plan, and allow things to go on as they are going. If it will influence you any," she added, with a blush, "I am confident that you need have no fear so far as Alma—"

She paused, too much overcome with confusion to finish the sentence.

"I knew I was not wrong," he said, in a low voice. "It is not necessary that some things should be spoken to have them understood. But it is safer—both for him and you—that a stop should be put to their intimacy."

A feeling of guilt came over her that she should seem to share in such a thought as this.

"Oh, no !" she cried. "Not for *me* ! It is *not* safer for *me*. I do not need the protection. Neither does he, sir. And think of the imputation. It would seem as if you believed there was danger, and that would set everybody to talking. Let things be as they are. From your own standpoint it is the best way. Alma and I are like sisters. She and Gerald are no closer. I am certain of it, so long as you force me to say so. And that brings me to what I came here for. Yes, it is about the water in the mill-stream that I want to speak about. Let it flow on unmolested. It is for my own sake I ask it, and if

**you really care anything for me, you will do as I request."**

Her earnestness was so great that it affected him even while he was forming a reply.

**"You do not know—"**

**"Never mind what your grievances have been. The greater they are, the nobler will be your victory if you pass them by. Dear Mr. Garston, I shall never forget the happiness you will give me by granting this simple favor. We are all going to Chicago together. Gerald will call upon me often, and if Alma and he are forbidden to speak how unpleasant it will be for me. Wait till our year in school is ended, if you can do no more. Promise me,"** she urged with all her powers of persuasion, **"promise me that you will wait a year!"**

John Garston would have laughed the idea to scorn, an hour before, that any slip of a girl could have had this influence over him. But he found his tenacity giving way before her pleading.

**"If it works harm—to you—mind, for I can see how it may do so, don't blame me,"** he said, relenting. **"I will be plain. I want you and Gerald to spend your lives together. Alma Adams is a girl of great strength of mind, and you will need to be careful that she does not use her powers to supplant you. It is useless to sneer at such a possibility. Such things have been done, and they may be again. If I make you a promise, you must make me another. Do not be coy to Gerald. Give him no cause to doubt the real state of your mind toward him. Many a lover has been chilled by pretended coolness. You are both young, but you are old enough to know your minds. Do not be too anxious to wait until**

he is settled in his profession. If he speaks, encourage him, and all will be well. But, even when I consent to your request that I shall do nothing to separate him from her, I fear—I fear.”

Edith caught both his hands in hers.

“You need fear nothing. Of course you won’t tell Gerald about my coming here, or that you have said any of these things to me. We are very young—indeed, I feel I am hardly more than a child. Let things alone, that is all there is to do. You have made me happier than you can imagine!”

With that she ran away, afraid to stay for anything more, and went home to tell her father that she had secured at least a temporary delay in the threatened hostilities. She did not tell him what else she had learned, for she could hardly bear even to think of it herself. Loving Gerald as she had done for so long, knowing as she had known for the past year that there was something more than ordinary affection between them, she had never till now put it into definite form even to her own heart. Mr. Garston had unlocked the secret chamber and enabled her to gaze upon the hidden treasures that she had hardly dared till then to call by their right name. Very sweet indeed was the sight, but the timorous soul felt something akin to fright at the revelation. And thus it has ever been since romance began to be written, and no doubt long centuries anterior to that day.

Gerald came back when it lacked but a fortnight of the day on which he was to depart for his law office, and the girls were to go with him to their seminary. His father, faithful to his promise to Edith, said nothing to him whatever about Alma.

Neither did he utter any further threats against Adams, though he did not withdraw his name from the list of parties to the mill-stream suit. That case was originally set down for trial in November, but Mr. Adams' attorney had had it postponed till spring in order that the jury might be able to see the full extent of the overflow. Things remained in *statu quo*, though it might be merely the calm that precedes the storm—the silence that is a precursor of the earthquake.

Garston repented the promise he had made when he heard, one morning, that several heavy loads, drawn by oxen, had been taken in the night time and lodged in an addition which Alvah had recently built to his mill. It seemed to him like a defiance—this preparation to enlarge the capacity of a concern which he—Garston—had the power to stop at his pleasure. At first he questioned the honor of Edith in the matter, fearing that she had informed Mr. Adams of the agreement which he had made, but he had too much confidence in her to hold this opinion for long. It was more like a decided challenge on the part of the mill-owner for him to do his worst. John had no doubt that the mysterious loads contained another set of mill-stones and the necessary machinery for putting them in operation. He was very angry at first, but he grew calmer on reflection. The larger Alvah's investment, the larger would be his loss when the power was destroyed. He could afford to wait, and when the year was ended not even the sweet voice of Edith Staples should persuade him from his revenge!

Both Mr. Adams and Colonel Staples with their wives had visited Chicago, making the journey in

company, to inspect the rooms which their daughters were to occupy, and to talk personally with the principal of the seminary. They had left word that Gerald was to have as free access to the girls as though he were a brother. Each of the fathers, in language strikingly similar, committed his daughter to the care of the young man, who was to see her to her journey's end, and act as a sort of guardian to her while there.

"I know of no one else to whom I would entrust Edith," said Colonel Staples, with feeling. "You have long seemed to me almost like a son, and I am glad you and she are to be so near each other. Visit her often and make her first separation from her parents as easy to her as you can."

"You and Alma seem more like brother and sister than anything else," was the way Mr. Adams put it. "I shall feel quite easy to know that she is where she can call upon you in case of necessity. It is the first time she has ever been from her mother and me, but she will not mind it so much when you are where you can see her every few days."

Gerald thanked both of them for their confidence, and made some perfunctory remarks to the effect that he hoped their faith in him was deserved. To this they each responded that they had no doubt of that, and the party set off. The girls kissed their parents repeatedly and promised to write very often. The station was crowded in their honor, and the good-byes that rent the air as the train moved away would have done credit to a presidential party. Only one face that might have been expected to be there was missing, that of Gerald's father, who had no mind to join in a celebration in



which Alvah Adams would have a share. He had bade farewell to his son at his house on the plea of business engagements.

On the way to Chicago the trio spent their time much as they ordinarily did when in the company of each other. Their seats in the Pullman faced each other. Gerald occupied one, and the girls, sitting opposite, passed the hours in conversation with him, never seeming at a loss for enough subjects of common interest.

Answering them when they spoke, and even inaugurating an occasional vein of his own, Gerald's thoughts were most of the time far from the topics discussed. He was trying to find some reason to prefer one of them to the other, as Clifford Nelson had so confidently assured him he must at once begin to do. Alma was the more superb, Edith the fairer and more delicate. Alma could vanquish her rival at repartee, excelling in brilliancy; Edith could rally her forces and convince by the clear and honest quality of her argument. Which of them would make a man happier as a partner for life? That, after all, was the great query.

He looked at the magnificent physique which Alma exhibited, even at her present age, saying to himself that she would never be otherwise than perfect as a physical being. He marked the rosy hue of her complexion, indicating health and evenness of temperament. Then he looked at Edith's clear blue eyes, the transparent whiteness of her hands and the sweet mobility of her mouth. Could he part with either of them? No, no! The time predicted when there would appear a preference had not yet come.

He slept in the upper berth that night, with the



girls clasped in each other's arms in the one beneath him. An extra crush of travel had prevented his procuring an additional section, as he had meant to do. He lay awake till past midnight, thinking of the picture that he could not see, and yet which was so near him.

There was the slenderer form, the more exquisite moulding that belonged to Edith ; and there were the rounder arms, the fuller figure of Alma. "*Which ?*" he cried, almost aloud. "*Which ?*" And there was no answer.

He might have either of them for life by the asking. Which ? *Which ?* WHICH should it be !!

"I love them both !" he reflected, pressing his pillow against his feverish head. "How can it end ? how can it end ?"



## CHAPTER XII.

### "DO YOU LOVE MY SON ?"

The girls liked their school. Having Gerald where they could see him nearly every day lessened the unpleasantness of their first absence from home. They were bright scholars and made rapid progress. The young men also did credit to themselves in the office of Thurston & Thurston, the law firm with which they were reading. The three fathers in Jefferson heard the news and were well pleased.

Nothing of special interest worth recording happened to the principal characters in this tale during

**the winter.** Nelson saw nothing to cause him to change the waiting position he had assumed. They all went home for a fortnight at Christmas, and then returned to their studies.

The second parting of Edith and Alma from their parents did not in the least resemble the first. They loved them as deeply as ever, but there was a good deal to both of them in the fact that they were not to be separated from Gerald. Had he remained at home, or gone in some other direction, there might have been a very different story to tell.

Late in the spring, or rather early in the summer, the law-suit of "*Garston, et al.*," as the papers were now made to read, against Alvah Adams, was tried in the county court. Neither the mill-owner nor his counsel, Major Noyes, had been idle. They confronted the belligerent farmers with expert testimony to the effect that the land, occasionally overflowed by the damming of the brook, had not been lessened but actually increased in value, and that the resulting irrigation enabled the owners to raise certain kinds of crops which brought prices superior to the cereals which they would otherwise have had to grow there. Not content with this, the Major artfully drew out of each contestant the price at which he valued his land per acre, showing subsequently that the damages claimed were much greater than the entire area covered was worth, and offering to buy every foot of it at a price above the valuation that any fair set of appraisers would put upon it. The result was that the jury, composed though it was mainly of farmers, who would naturally have felt a sympathy for their fellow tillers of the soil, had no choice but to find a verdict for the defendant. And

the judge, from his place on the bench, took occasion to compliment them for their decision, and to declare that he had never had a case of greater worthlessness brought before him in the whole course of his administration of justice.

It may be imagined that John Garston did not find his temper improved by the result of the trial. He stood a silent listener to a conversation which took place among the suitors and their attorney, the redoubtable Lawyer Cass of Des Moines, outside the court house, when the case was ended, and only spoke when Adams passed on his way to his carriage, which stood with its driver awaiting him.

"He's running the mill with *my water*, anyway," he said, "and when I am ready to stop him I shall."

Alvah Adams disdained to reply directly to this thrust, meant evidently to anger him, but what he had to say he directed at the crowd indiscriminately.

"It is in no man's power to stop my mill. I am not in the habit of boasting much, but if any person tries it, you'll see that what I say is true."

Before he could reach his carriage, however, Mr. Crane stepped up to him in a state of intense anger.

"You can do everything, Alvah Adams, we all know that!" he cried, shaking his clenched hand at him. "You can overflow our lands, and spoil our crops, and when we come to a jury they will decide in your favor. You have money! That's your hold! How much did you *pay* to get that verdict, eh?"

If Adams had reflected a moment he would have let this observation pass for the vaporings of a disappointed man, but the insinuation stung him to the quick. He prided himself on the stainlessness of his

honor, and had the expenditure of a single cent been sufficient to assure him the verdict he would have spurned the proposal to use it in any unfair influencing of justice.

"Go along, you old fool!" he retorted, angrily. "If you were not too full of whiskey to know what you are saying I would have you put under arrest and made to eat those words."

Crane had been drinking, there was no doubt of that, but he had a gray head and some of the audience cried, "Shame!" There was little feeling in Adams' favor there, and a crowd of that sort is not apt to be discriminating in its judgments.

"Oh, *you've* got money!" yelled Crane. "*You* can do anything!"

Trying hard to control himself, Adams walked nearer to his carriage, the driver of which was becoming uneasy. Seeing him retreating, several of the bystanders took up the refrain, in more or less loud tones, but all of them distinct enough to reach his ears. As he heard them, his rage was kindled anew, and he turned about.

"Yes, I *have* got money, honestly earned as any money ever was, and I don't propose to have a set of thieves and blackmailers cheat me out of it, either! I can buy up every man in this crowd, and have a balance left in the bank afterwards. If any of you are dissatisfied with the verdict come to me to-morrow and I'll take every acre and building you own and give you the cash for it. If you have anything to sell, come to me like square men and say so, but don't come like chicken-thieves and try to get what doesn't belong to you!"

The effect of this extraordinary speech was to

silence the party till he could get into his carriage and drive away, when the smothered flame broke forth again. All that could be said against Adams was brought out, and the disappointed litigants and their sympathizers exhausted invective in abuse of this "tyrant," who had grown rich beyond their power to understand, and consequently faster than he had any honest right to do.

Garston grew white about the lips when Adams launched his epithet at them indiscriminately, but when they turned to him for an explanation of his threat, he only repeated it.

"He is using my water to run his mill with, and when I get ready to stop him I shall."

It was the only consolation they could obtain, and unsatisfactory as it was they tried to find comfort in it. Some thought Lawyer Cass ought to be compelled to refund part of the money he had got out of them, the sum having aggregated something over a thousand dollars, but others contended that lawyers were not in the habit of doing business that way. Before they got through, being in a vicious temper with everything and everybody, they fell to quarrelling among themselves, and several blows were exchanged. After which the party broke up in confusion.

Within the next month three of the litigants, becoming disgusted with life in that vicinity, availed themselves of Mr. Adams' proposition, sold him their estates and moved away. And soon happiness was restored to his heart and household by the coming home of his daughter for the long summer vacation.

A year had done much for Alma. Her beauty had ripened rapidly as she approached her twentieth



birthday, until it seemed at times fairly dazzling. Her dark eyes had never been so bright, her brown hair so lustrous, or her olive skin so perfect in its purity of blood. She was a little taller, a little rounder, a little more mature, but still hardly more than a large child, who had no notion of assuming the station of full womanhood. As she alighted from the train and flew to meet her father and mother, kissing each with the passionate fervor of her disposition, the villagers who saw the sight found a murmur of admiration passing from one end of the crowd to the other.

"Isn't she perfectly lovely!" remarked one young swain to his sweetheart, too much affected by the apparition to think what a very inappropriate thing it was to say to her. But the crowd took up the expression and passed it along. "Perfectly lovely!" was repeated over and over again.

Alma had seen her parents from the window, and hastily waving her hand to them had rushed to the door and left the car step almost before the train came to a stand. One or two other passengers alighted, and then came Gerald, escorting Edith. As Miss Staples came into view the doubt of Jefferson as to which was the more lovely of the twain received its usual strain. All eyes turned from Alma to her friend and the expressions of admiration broke out afresh.

Beautiful as a lily, with a complexion such as wealthy belles would gladly spend a fortune to imitate; with sapphire eyes, fair hair, the motion of a swan and the smile of an angel, Edith Staples had her moment of adoration, too. There was a minute of consultation among the party, and then a hasty



separation. The closed carriages of the Adams and the Staples families, with their hired drivers—the only ones in town—drove away with their burdens, and an open buggy, sent by a farm boy, took Gerald to his father's.

John Garston received his son with few words. His taciturnity was so well known that anything else would have aroused surprise. He questioned Gerald briefly as to whether he was satisfied with the year he had spent at Chicago, asked about one or two minor matters, and then relapsed into silence.

"I shall spend most of my vacation here," said Gerald. "Is there any way in which I can help you?"

His father was astonished at the question. He had never asked his son for the slightest assistance upon the farm, knowing his disinclination for agricultural pursuits, and he could not understand what put this idea into his head. But he contented himself with a simple negative. After eating his supper, Gerald strolled over to Mr. Adams' house, where both the girls were awaiting him, as they had agreed to do before they parted at the train.

There was one thing that Mr. Garston wanted more than anything else now, and that was to see Edith, and have another talk with her. He did not know how to arrange it, and over a week passed before he happened to meet her where others were not present. When the opportunity came, and he encountered her on the road from the Adams place to her own home he only stopped to say good-morning and to ask her when she could find time to see him in private.

"I have something to say to you," said he. It

will not take long, but I do not wish to be interrupted."

"I shall consider any time mine that you appoint," was the prompt answer.

"The sooner it is over the better," he mused. "I will send Gerald away to-night on an errand, if you will call at the house. Better make it nine o'clock or about that."

"I will be there," she replied, and they separated.

Promptly at the time appointed she came, and found him sitting alone on the veranda, awaiting her. He had given Gerald a commission that would take him away for an hour or two, and as he seldom had visitors no one was likely to disturb them.

"I know you will believe, Miss Edith," he said, coming directly to the point, "that there is no one whom I would rather please than you. Nearly a year ago I was about to arrange a piece of business which I thought necessary, when, in obedience to your request, I postponed it."

"You mean, I trust, that you abandoned it altogether," she interrupted him to say.

"I post-poned it," he answered, deliberately, "for—a—year. The time is nearly expired, and I want no misunderstanding. I have wished many times that I had not made you that promise, but having made it, I kept it. Nothing could induce me to make it again."

"May I not hope—" she began.

He stopped her with a trace of impatience.

"That is all there is to that subject, if you please. Now, will you tell me if you and Gerald are as good friends as ever."

She struggled with herself a moment, for she felt

that she was defeated, but she thought it best not to cross him. She responded that she and Gerald were on the same pleasant terms that they had always been.

"But—excuse me, you know why I ask it, is there anything more—nothing definite—between you?"

She shook her head, with deepening color.

"Oh, there is so much time for that! Why, it will be years and years before I shall want to think of it."

"And meanwhile you have no fears of losing him?"

She smiled now.

"Not the least."

"Nor that Alma Adams—"

"She is and always will be our dearest friend. Unless," she added, impressively, "you are so cruel as to destroy that friendship."

He spoke with more earnestness than she had supposed him capable of exhibiting.

"Edith, do you love my son very much?"

She looked into his eyes, a little startled at his manner.

"Yes," she said, timidly.

"You would not like to have another take him from you?"

"No." And from the heavenly blue of her eyes there fell a raindrop on his hand.

"Then let me warn you not to let him be too close in this friendship with that handsome girl. He is easily influenced. He has a soul as gentle as your own, and the slightest thing may turn him. It is the height of folly for you to imagine that they can be thrown together at all seasons without something

more than ordinary attraction. Draw him away from her before you are too late!"

Edith listened to him with alarm, but not with any fear that his words could come true. She trembled at the thought that he should have formed such an idea.

"Why, Gerald loves me," she answered in a whisper. "It is not necessary that he should say so in words or that any promise should be made between us. We have loved each other ever since we were children. He has shown his affection for me in a thousand ways. I know it—I feel it! Alma is our dear friend, whom I could never suspect of unfaithfulness. She knows our love for each other, though it has never been talked over, and why should it be? Ah, Mr. Garston, you do her wrong if you entertain the slightest suspicion that she would separate Gerald and me!"

She was so earnest that he wished he could agree with her, but he was a practical man and he told her that he was fully convinced to the contrary.

"If you think it unmaidenly to find from his own lips just how he stands," said he, "I shall endeavor to discover it for myself. I could never consent that a son of mine should link his life with a daughter of Alvah Adams. You think, you say you are sure, that he never would do so. I also must be certain. For I assure you, loving Gerald as I do, and he is the only thing on earth for whom I care much, I would never allow him to speak to me again, never own him as a relation, should he make a marriage of that kind."

He had spoken at an unusual length for him, and she had the rest of the conversation principally to herself, most of his replies being in monosyllables. Say

what she might she could not move him from either point on which he had decided. He would do as he pleased about the mill-power and he would have a talk with Gerald, advising him to have less to do with Miss Adams ; in fact, to break off his friendship with the entire Adams family.

"I won't have him going there !" he said, angrily. "If he is stubborn, he must choose between us. And if you are wise, Miss Edith, you will aid instead of hindering me in that matter."

She felt the complete uselessness of arguing with him, but she uttered a final protest, declaring that she could not bear to think that a friendship as pure and sweet as they three had enjoyed for nearly fifteen years should be broken up for a mere whim ; and that she should be compelled to do all in her power to prevent Gerald and Alma from sacrificing their old friendship for each other.

"You will advise my son to disobey my request, is that it ?" he asked.

"You must remember," she said, "that he is nearly twenty-three—"

"But a boy still—a boy who does not know his mind—who must be guided as other boys are. It is useless to talk longer with me, Miss Edith. We see things differently."

Garston rose with a motion which clearly meant farewell, and Edith started to leave.

"I will go part of the way with you," he said.

"No," she interrupted, pleasantly, "I am afraid of nothing. All I ask of you is that you will think it over. Good-night."

Every word of this conversation had been heard by an unsuspected listener, none other than Gerald

himself. He had started on the errand with which his father had entrusted him, and becoming doubtful of a portion of the message he was to deliver, had returned by a rear path to ask that it be more fully explained. While searching for his father he had heard Edith's voice, and had paused from sheer wonder that she should be there. The first words that caught his ear were these: "Are you and Gerald as good friends as ever?" He could not resist waiting one moment to hear her reply, and after that he was in a quandary, for either to advance or retreat might subject him to the suspicion of being the eavesdropper that he was, and he did not wish to appear contemptible to either of them.

He had heard it all, and when they separated he pursued his journey, fain to let the message take care of itself, as there was no feasible way of bettering it now. As he walked along the road he heard over again what had been said. He had known that his father did not like Alvah Adams, but he had not supposed the feud could grow to this proportion. So it was to come to separating him from Alma, was it? It was true that he was nothing but a boy who did not know his own mind, but he would not willingly submit to dictation like this. Never before had he been made to feel parental restraint, and the first pull of the cord was not pleasant. Separate him from Alma! Forbid him to see her! What nonsense! He could not and would not bear it.

Then he thought of the loveliness of Edith's confession, made without fear or blush. She loved him, and had owned it to the one who was by the ties of nature nearest to him and had the best right to ask her. It was very sweet to know that she cared so



dearly for him, this girl whom he had loved "ever since," as she herself put it, "they were children!" He had never loved her as much as he did at this moment, nor felt more the impossibility of going through life without her counsel and companionship. How noble and generous she was in her references to Alma! Many girls, he well knew, would have sacrificed their friend rather than incur the slightest risk of losing their lover. He was angry with himself that he was walking in an opposite direction, on an errand of little importance, instead of back to the village by her side, with her arm linked in his. If he were there at this moment she should no longer have to confess that he had never told her definitely of the love he bore her and the hope that lay next his heart.

And then there came a pain, a sudden twinge, in that heart, so fickle and yet so true. For he knew that however much he loved Edith, Alma was no less dear to him!



## CHAPTER XIII.

"THERE ARE TIGERS IN ASIA."

There was no corn on the Garston farm that year, nor any of the numerous varieties of "small crops" that ripen late. There was not even a garden planted. Nothing but the winter wheat, that is harvested in the latter part of June, had covered his acres, The neighbors speculated upon this fact and

came to various conclusions. Some said, with an air of wisdom, that John wanted his money all at once in order to meet the payment of his interest, and that was why he had raised the kind of grain that matures earliest. Others guessed at the true reason—his desire to clear the fields so that he could tap the brook as soon as possible and cut off the supply of water that turned the wheels of Alvah Adams' mill.

Edith Staples had gone with her father and mother on a month's visit to relations at a distance. She had parted with regret from Gerald, even for this brief time, and he had said many pleasant things to her during the calls that he made after her journey was decided upon. He meant to tell her before she left that she held a place in his heart dearer than that of a mere friend—meant to tell her in set phrase—but when he approached the subject the words failed to come. Once when he stammered something of what was in his mind, she quite prevented his going any farther by saying that she entirely understood him ; that there was no need of his saying anything more ; and that she had entire confidence and faith in his truth and honor.

"Don't neglect Alma while I am gone," she said, at the last, with a little tremor of the voice. "But don't forget Edith, either."

He assured her that he could never forget her, present or absent, and asked her to write often, which she promised to do.

Gerald went from the station, where he and Alma had been to see the party off, to the home of the Adamses, somewhat depressed. But the brightness of Alma's spirits soon had their effect upon his own, and he was gayer than ever within an hour. After

the early tea, in which he participated with the family, he and Alma strolled down to the grove where the summer-house was located and took a short ride on the little lake there. She was an expert oarswoman and insisted that, as he was her guest, she must do the rowing. Wishing only to make her happy he consented with some reluctance to sit in the stern and allow her to furnish the motive power that impelled the small craft. As she bent forward and put her strength into the work he noticed as he never had before the magnificence of her physique. She wore a dress with sleeves of open work, and the pink flesh showed distinctly as the roundness of her arms stood out in relief. The neck was cut low and the beauty of the throat was apparent. She had worn her long hair in two braids from a sudden fancy, and the loose locks that played about her forehead added piquancy to her expression. But it was not her olive skin, her dark eyes, or her bewitching dress that made her irresistible to him on that evening. It was the clear and shining star of love that had set itself on her brow and beamed through all obstacles into his very soul.

When they reached the center of the lake, she ceased rowing. He begged to be permitted to take the oars from her, but she was obdurate, saying that she only intended to rest a few minutes there, where all was so still, and then row back to the shore. The night was cloudy and no one walking on the bank could have espied them. He changed his seat to the one by her side. They conversed in low whispers, laughing at trifles in a suppressed way, and neither was at ease. The oars had been placed in position on the edge of the boat and nothing pre-

vented Gerald obeying a sudden impulse to take Alma's hand in his. As he touched it all the blood in his body seemed tugging at his brain.

"Let us not go in!" he said, in a whisper. "Let us never go in again!"

She leaned toward him, as if intoxicated with his words, and as she did so he put his arms about her. As long as he had known her, this was the first time he had ever done that or anything approaching it.

The boat drifted but little. There was no appreciable current in the lake, which had an outlet only through a little brook that ran sluggishly toward the Mississippi, wandering five miles at least to every one that a crow's flight would have taken to reach its destination. Gerald felt the yielding form lying close against him and the effect on his unaccustomed senses was most powerful.

Alma raised her face to his. She had loved him all her life and now must be the beginning of that love's fruition. He felt her breath fanning his lips, but he was afraid to touch that sweet mouth with his own.

"A moment, my love!" he gasped.

Astonished, she drew herself a little away.

"Not—not too far," he articulated. "In a minute I shall be myself."

She put her hand, cool and moist even though she trembled with excitement, upon his head, and was alarmed to find the fever that raged there.

"You are not well!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, yes!" he answered. "Alma—I think I never was well till now."

She laid her cheek to his and for some time there

was no sound but the beating of their hearts, so near together.

"I shall get used to it, after awhile," were his first words, "but at present you affect me like a strong galvanic battery. Just think, I am nearly twenty-three and yours is the first girl's face that ever touched mine."

"There was never any one else?" she responded, shyly.

"No," he answered. "And there never can be!"

With such interchanges of sentiment they passed the next ten minutes, and then Alma roused herself.

"We must go back," she said. "It is dark, and we ought to be on the way."

"How can you be so prosaic!" he exclaimed. "It is always light where you are."

Nevertheless he suffered her to take up the oars and with noiseless motions she brought the boat to its landing. He assisted her to tie it to the ring in the platform, and then they took the path toward home. As they passed the summer-house gate he held back.

"It is still early," he said, in low tones. "Let us go in for a little while."

"But there is no one there," was her answer.

"Surely, that is not necessary."

The strong sense of her training came to her rescue.

"No," she replied. "We will go to my house, and sit in a corner of the veranda."

He wore a look of disappointment as he started to comply. Seeing that he did not seem content she asked the reason.

"You do not trust me," was his answer.

"Because I would rather go home than into the summer-house?"

"Yes."

"What has that to do with trusting you?" she asked, simply.

For an instant he felt like a cross between an idiot and a villain. He knew that the half formed thought of evil that had forced its way into his mind had been exhibited in all its naked deformity. She had repelled it, not with anger or an assumption of superior virtue, but by a refusal to understand. He feared that she never could forget this moment, and he cursed the folly into which his mad humor had led him.

"Don't make a serious thing of it, Alma," he said, trying to force a laugh. "I was only trying you. Of course I did not think that you would go in there, at this time of the evening, and if you had consented, I should have refused. Why, it would be preposterous! Not that there would be any real harm, but on account of what it would give people a chance to say. That affair in the boat has turned my head, I really believe. Come, let us talk of something else."

Alma was quite willing to talk of other things, but he had not in the least undeceived her. She knew that he had wanted her to stop at the summer-house, and that all the gossip of Mrs. Grundy that might have been in prospective would not have prevented his going had she not objected. But what girl of nineteen can find the sun of her first day's love sky much obscured by such a small cloud as this? Before they had reached her home they were talking brightly of other things.

Mr. Adams saw them coming, and went to tell his



wife that Alma had returned. He heard their steps on the veranda and discreetly refrained from disturbing them. As long as they were together he was quite content. Never doubting that his daughter was the dearest girl on earth to Gerald, he thought it only right to give him every opportunity to be alone with her. It is the American method, and though Mrs. Adams, having had a different training, sometimes uttered a mild protest, she always succumbed to what she considered her husband's superior judgment.

She had supreme confidence in her daughter, of course. Was there ever a mother who did not believe that her daughter could be trusted under all circumstances? Other women's girls might forget, but hers, never! And yet, since the world began to revolve on its axis, some of them must have been mistaken.

It was but little after nine o'clock when they came upon the veranda, but it was much later when they separated. They talked of everything, from the condition of the weather to the journey of Edith Staples.

"Do you know," said Alma, suddenly, "I was almost inclined to be jealous of dear Edie a few weeks ago? Of course I couldn't really have been so, but—somehow—you seemed just as attentive to her as you did to me—and, well, it's all right now. I love her dearly, and I wouldn't have anything come between us for the world. She is so sweet, but I don't believe she ever will marry. When I get a home of my own I should be so happy if she would come and live with me."

The face of Edith came back to him, the sweet,

gentle, truthful face that had looked up to him when her confidence in his honor had been vouched for. But he was under the influence of a stronger nature, and the twinge that it gave him was only momentary.

"How did you choose me when you have always had her near you?" was the next thing that startled him. "I am sure she is much the better looking, and I never can hope to compare with her in grace. You are the only man who would have turned to me with such a choice before him."

"No, I am not," he interrupted. "There is Cliff Nelson."

She asked him what he meant by that.

"Why, Cliff has been crazy over you ever since the first day I brought him here. He has taken it for granted that Edith and I would make a match, and that you would favor him when you put me out of your mind."

"Nonsense! He never showed it," she said, much pleased, nevertheless.

"No, it is true. Cliff is too bashful for anything. But he loves you, Alma. He will be all broken up when he hears of this, and I suppose he must hear some time."

Alma gave a start.

"Oh, no, he mustn't. That is, I mean, for ever so long. You have three years yet before you are admitted to the bar, and a good while after that before you can get into a practice. I don't want you to tell any one, and I shall not, either. No," she added, thoughtfully, "not even Edie, nor my father or mother."

They were sitting close together and the influence of her nearness affected him strongly.

"Do you think," he said, "that I am going to wait years and years for you? Why, it seems horrible cruelty that I must watch the clock to-night even." He pulled out his watch. "Look at those racing hands! It is a quarter past ten, and they are doing their best to make it twenty minutes. It will be eleven soon, and then twelve. And when my limit is up, I must go and leave you!"

His arm was about the back of her chair, and she shrank into its curves very prettily.

"The folks are abed long ago," said she, "and there is no hurry. You can stay as long as you wish."

"But still I shall have to go," he responded, with a clouded face. "No matter how long I stay, I shall have to go at last. That is what spoils everything."

She could not help feeling a little of what was in his words.

"Perhaps," she said, slowly, "we shall not have to wait many years. Perhaps you will get a law practice very soon after your admission that we can live on, in a very quiet way, of course. It will not take much, I think, for a year or two. My father will give me all that I shall want at the start, and he would lend you some money, if you needed it."

This grated severely on Gerald's sensitiveness.

"My own father would do that," he replied, quickly. "But I cannot bring myself to think of anything like years in connection with waiting for you. Months seem too long, even weeks."

He turned upon her with the force of sudden passion and pressed his lips to hers. For a moment she

abandoned herself to the delirium, and then she gently drew herself away from him.

"Hush !" she whispered, soothingly. "We must be very wise and sensible. There is nothing to do but wait. In a few weeks you will be back at your studies, and then, with so much to occupy your mind, the time will pass more rapidly."

"And you," he said, "will be at the Seminary, within a few miles of me, and I shall see you often, as I have been doing. Do you think I can pore over Coke and Chitty with your countenance ever before me? No. I shall think of you all day, visit you every evening, and lie awake dreaming of you all night."

This vivid statement of probabilities made Alma laugh softly.

"I will go to some other school if it will help you any," she said. "There are plenty that are hundreds of miles away. What is there to keep you from getting along as well as you have done during the last year?"

He laid his head on her shoulder.

"It will never be the same again," he answered. "I shall never be the same. Nothing will be as it used. I had not kissed you then. There are tigers in Asia, I have read, that having tasted human flesh will eat no other food. Alma, you have made a tiger of me !"

She bent her head and touched her cheek to his.

"A terrible fate !" she exclaimed humorously. "To be eaten alive daily by a ravenous beast !"

Gerald tasted the lips again, and then sat upright.

"I cannot bear it !" he cried. "There is but one

choice for us, Alma. Either we must be married speedily, or I must not be alone with you !”

Her heart beat wildly, though her reason was in arms against him.

“Do not speak like that, I beg you !” she said. “A speedy marriage is out of the question. We are both too young. We must wait. Fix your mind on that fact, and be strong.”

Gerald stood up and stretched his arms above his head.

“Let me go now, at least,” he said, in a whisper. “I shall come to you to-morrow with more sense in my head. To-night I have none—absolutely none. If I were to kiss you again, I should bite you. Yes, I am in danger of becoming a tiger indeed.”

She felt the tears rising to her eyes, but with a powerful effort she repressed them.

“If you must go, good-night,” she said. “You know best. Whatever you have said or may say, whatever you have thought or may think, I love you. No,” she stepped backward, as he essayed to clasp her waist, “I think it is not wise to-night. We have been very happy—I have, at least. Come in the morning and I will sing for you.”

He had his hat off and was brushing his hair back with his hand.

“There is one way,” he said, “which would make everything right, if you loved me enough to do it. We might have a secret marriage, and later, we could have the public one, just the same, and nobody know the difference. It has been done that way often, and there is no possibility of harm.”

Alma looked the least bit insulted as she heard him.

"What for?" she asked. "Are you afraid of losing me? Do you think I can ever change?"

"No!" he cried. "But I want you *now*!"

She stood there a minute, revolving the proposition in her mind. From the bottom of her soul she pitied him.

"It could not be," she said, slowly, at last. "It would be wronging my parents, who have a right to know every act of mine of such great importance as that. It would be wronging myself, Gerald; it would be wronging you. This is a temporary ebullition and will pass away. Let me be a help to your life, not a hindrance. Go on with your studies and when the right time comes—and I assure you I am as anxious for the day as you—we will be united before the world. I could not bear to carry a secret from my father and mother, and whatever the ceremony by which we were joined, I should feel guilty."

Like oil on troubled waters were the words of the maiden. The young man's brow cleared and he drew Alma to his side with a tender movement.

"I am not good enough for you!" he said, his voice choking. "But you shall hear nothing more like this. Be as gentle with me as you can, and time will make it all right with us."

The tears she had held back flew to her eyes as she gazed after his form, which soon vanished among the trees that bordered the winding avenue.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## ALMA'S CAMBRIC WRAPPER.

All Jefferson was awake to the fact that something was going to happen. It was whispered about the village that John Garston had at last been unable, by any means that he could summon, to pay his interest to the Iowa Investment Company, and that his farm would be sold at public auction to the highest bidder as soon as the necessary formalities could be gone through with. The mysterious way in which he had met the difficulties of former years were rehearsed among the townspeople, and some predicted that the luck of finding some way out of the dilemma would again be his. But the greater number said his time had come. They said that a first mortgage with interest in arrears, a second mortgage of unusual size, and a mortgage on every animal and tool on his place could not be carried forever. The price of wheat was low that year, and even if it had been higher it would not have saved him, for in pursuance of a custom not uncommon in the West he had pledged the entire crop as it grew to money-lenders, in exchange for "accommodation." Now said the people who knew these things, the Garston farm must go.

Who would purchase it? They were not long in deciding that question. Who purchased everything in the way of land that was offered in Jefferson? Why, Alvah Adams, of course, the man whose purse seemed always full. The Garston place joined his,

and besides, his possession of it would settle the vexed subject of the mill-power. Once in his hands no one could scare him again with threats to cut off the water from his profitable grist-mill.

Garston said nothing to any one about his troubles. The notice of intent to foreclose appeared in the county paper. There was but a few weeks lacking of the time when the auctioneer would stand with his hammer on the steps of the house and offer it to whoever chose to buy. This land that he had found in the midst of a wilderness, and had broken to the plow almost literally with his own hands ; this dwelling that he had reared, in which his wife had died and his son been born ; these stables and graneries which had held his stock and wheat for more than twenty years, all must be sacrificed to meet the demands of creditors who had never even seen them. That subtle thing called *interest*, which labors day and night, in fair weather and foul, amid the snows of winter and the scorching days of summer, whether crops be large or small, whether the one who owes it be sick or well, had done the business for him. Long years ago he had admitted the monster to his house and it had stubbornly refused to budge, though fed with twice its bulk of bread and meat. It had sapped his strength, his courage and his power to produce even the food which it demanded, and now it purposed strangling him, that it might claim all he had for its own.

Gerald did not see the notice in the newspaper. He cared little for the county news, and had he read the paper he would have been very unlikely to notice such a thing as an advertisement of foreclosure. But when it had appeared twice, and he had not shown

in any way that he knew of it, Mr. Adams thought it his duty to have a talk with him and advance a proposition.

The shock to the young man when he was made to understand the situation was very great. Until that moment he had not known that his father was indebted to any man to the value of a penny. Mr. Adams told him the whole truth, in the kindest and most sympathetic manner. Gerald proposed various ways of tiding over the difficulties which clustered about his parent, but he was compelled to tear out the supports from under them, one by one. The first mortgage was equal to sixty per cent. of the value of the property. The second covered very nearly all the rest. Other incumbrances entangled everything else that might have been availed of in the emergency.

"I'll tell you the whole truth, painful as it is," said Mr. Adams, "it is best that you should not be deceived in any way."

"And my father, in the loving kindness of his heart, has kept it all a secret," said Gerald, sadly. "He has sent me to school with money that he could not afford to pay for that purpose. He has labored on alone, when I might have been of some use to him and has borne his burden without telling me of its existence. It will now be for me to do something in return, if indeed I am fit for anything."

Mr. Adams bowed approvingly, saying that these sentiments did honor to his young friend.

"There is something more that I must tell you," he added. "For reasons which I cannot feel are any fault of mine I have incurred the enmity of your father."

"Nothing more than arose out of a controversy upon the mill-stream question, I think," Gerald hastened to interrupt.

"It is much older and deeper than that," replied Mr. Adams. "It is unnecessary to go into it, for I might not be able to state the case as fairly as one unprejudiced could do it. Whatever the reason, your father hates me cordially. The suit you speak of went against him and his friends, and he has since threatened to cut the bank of the brook where it borders on his land and shut off my power. The result would be to deluge a large part of his own territory, to his injury; but I think he intends to carry out the scheme. This would of course result in a loss to me financially and in no gain to him. What I want to say to you is this: In the event of the sale of his place, which it seems now can hardly be prevented, this state of affairs will compel me, for my own protection, to be a bidder."

The young man heard with wonder. It was all so new to him that he could not comprehend it in all its bearings. He only said, "Yes, sir," and waited for Mr. Adams to proceed.

"I need not say," said the mill-owner, "that I have the greatest regard for you. I have felt ever since you were big enough to walk over here and take Alma to school as if you were almost a son of my own, and this unhappy disagreement has given me particular uneasiness on your account. I have feared that it would trouble—my—my daughter—and make annoyance for both of you, which I naturally wished to avoid if possible. You—you understand me?"

"Yes," said Gerald. "I understand."

At the same time he wondered if he did

"I want to prevent any rupture that will trouble you and Alma," proceeded the elder man. "I want you to feel that you have a friend in me on whom you can call—you can call—as freely as if there had never been any feeling against me on your father's part. At the same time, as a business man, I wish to protect my mill."

Gerald said "Certainly," like one in a dream.

"What I wish to propose," continued Mr. Adams, "is this: I will attend the sale of the farm, and, if possible, become its purchaser. After that I will leave it in your hands to do what you please with, and you can arrange with your father to remain and cultivate the soil as he has always done, if he desires. When you have finished your law studies, and become successful, you can redeem the estate, only ceding to me enough to make my ownership in the brook beyond question.

Mr. Adams leaned back in his chair, for they were sitting in his parlor, with the air of one who wanted to know if anything could be fairer than that.

"I do not quite see," said Gerald, "how I am to pursue my studies any longer. If my father is penniless, I cannot ask him to labor for me while I continue idle. It will be my place to relinquish my career and do something in return for the sacrifices he has made."

"A very natural thought," said Mr. Adams, "and one that I am glad to hear you utter. But the best service you can render your father is to continue your studies and get into a position to earn a good deal more than you could ever hope to do in ordinary ways. Two or three years of successful law

practice—and I could aid you a good deal in getting established—would bring more than three times as much as if spent in ordinary avocations. In this world it does not do to think of to-day alone. We must keep an eye on the future. If your father should not feel able to furnish you the means to continue your studies, though with the plan I have outlined he ought to have no trouble in so doing, I shall be only too glad to lend you the necessary amount—lend you, on your personal note—and let you return it at your leisure, when you feel able, in later years.”

Gerald thanked him and said that he would consider the matter. He wanted time to think. The truth was, he found the whole recital very disagreeable. It is not pleasant to learn that one's father is bankrupt and that one may have to depend on the bounty of others for the comforts of life, and it is difficult to be thankful in the proper degree to the person who brings us the tidings, no matter how generous or considerate he may appear. Gerald went to find Alma, and after a short talk with her, excused himself on account of work in his study which he felt obliged to do. He walked back to his father's thinking what a dreary world this was, after all. As he turned into the familiar gate, which was to belong to his family but a few days longer, he could have wept outright with vexation.

John Garston saw that something unusual had happened, as soon as his eyes rested on the clouded face of his son, and suspected that the inevitable knowledge had come to him—that knowledge that he had tried more than once to impart and had never found himself quite able to do so.



"What's the matter, Gerald?" he asked, with unusual solicitude in his tone. "You do not look happy."

Gerald tried to say something, but for a minute he could not articulate a single word. Then he broke out, passionately :

"Oh, father, why have you kept it from me so long?"

"Why should I have told you? Would it have made you any happier?" was the answer. "I wanted you to get your profession first. There is no money for an honest man in farming. It takes a schemer to amass a fortune out of land—such a man as Alvah Adams!" he added, with flashing eyes. "A lawyer is all right anywhere. I hoped you would be ready to get your own living before the crash came, but I guess it's on us now."

He spoke with a quiet resignation that surprised the young man, and made him hope that he would avail himself of the olive branch which he could offer.

"What has made you so bitter against Mr. Adams?" he asked. "He would help us, I am sure, in an emergency like this."

"Would he?" The resigned air was gone, and an expression of intense hatred took its place. "I hope he'll wait till somebody asks him. I've no doubt he'd like to help me, and so get some hold on *you*. Gerald," he spoke now with earnestness, "I trust there has been nothing serious between you and Alma! I would rather see you in your grave than to have you join your blood to his!"

The young man paled before the question, put in the way it was.

"There is nothing—there must be nothing!" pur-

sued the aroused father. "Edith Staples loves you and you have given her cause to think that your mind is fixed on her. She is worth a thousand Adamses. Her father has always treated me like a gentleman. It would make me happy to see her your wife. But if you should so far forget my wishes as to marry the other one—"

He paused, overcome by the violence of his emotions, and then added—

"We should have to be strangers, my boy, from that day."

There was nothing in the nature of Gerald to withstand an onslaught like this. His love for his father had always been strong, and this morning it had been newly aroused by the light thrown upon the kindness of that parent in bearing his griefs alone, that he might have a calm, untroubled ride on the sea of life. He forgot the words he had so recently exchanged with Alma, forgot for the moment everything but the debt he owed to this, the only relation whom he knew.

"Nothing shall come between us, father," he said, firmly.

John Garston caught his son to his breast as though he were only a child.

"I knew it!" he cried. "I knew I could rely upon you! You have some of my spirit in you, after all! And you will not marry against my will?"

Gerald's heart grew cold in his bosom, but he answered—

"No."

"You must leave it to me to arrange in my own way," he added, presently. "I must have full lib-

erty to see Alma, and part from her as pleasantly as I can. We have been intimate from babyhood, and it will take a little time. Yes—it will take—a little time."

Gerald began the task assigned him that very afternoon, by going to make Alma a call. She noted his extreme paleness, but when she commented upon it, he said he had a headache. Nothing would content her but that he must lie on a sofa in the sitting-room, and let her bind up his head in camphor water. Though he protested at first he found it not unpleasant when she sat by his side and held one of his hands in hers, while with her other hand she smoothed back the hair from his temples, which were really throbbing now.

Alma was clad that afternoon in a light cambric wrapper, which in its simplicity became her figure well. Her dark eyes grew luminous from sheer tenderness, as they shone upon him, and he wondered how he could ever bring himself to say to her what he had promised to do. After a while he changed his head from the pillow to her lap, saying that the former position made the ache worse, and the longer he lay there the harder it seemed to him to take the step he had contemplated.

"I cannot lie here," he said, finally. "All the blood in me seems to rush to my head. Let me try sitting up a little while ; and won't you give me a brush, so that I can make my hair look like that of a Christian."

She brought the brush, but insisted on arranging the hair herself, and as she bent over it, he felt her warm and fragrant breath on his cheek.

"You can do it better this way," he said, drawing

her upon his knee. She made no objection to the new position, but went on with her work, stretching her neck to see where the parting ought to be. This brought her fair throat within easy distance of his lips.

"If you do that, I can't finish your hair," she said, drawing her dimpled chin down over the place he had caressed.

"The hair is a secondary matter," he answered. "I would have gone away looking like a Comanche chief, rather than have missed that opportunity."

She called him a silly fellow, but she did not act as if she thought so, and after finishing the parting she continued to sit there on his knee, putting one hand on his shoulder as a balance.

"That's a pretty dress you have on," he commented.

"Is it? The cost was twelve cents a yard. You see it is not expensive to clothe girls," she responded, demurely.

"Oh, but they wear so many other things!"

"Yes, they do wear *some*." She hesitated, laughing and blushing. "But the entire outfit can be had for very little money. Mamma has always claimed that extravagance in clothing is almost a sin, and she has brought me up with fixed ideas on the matter of economy."

"Your husband will owe her thanks," he said, blandly.

In spite of all he had promised his father, and although he fully meant in some way to carry out that promise, he could not bear to give up thinking just a little longer of this beautiful creature as a possible Mrs. Garston. It was delicious merely to hold her

on his knee, and to see the loving glances that shot at him every time she raised those wonderful eyes to his face. He tried, even with Alma there in his lap, to think of Edith, but he felt there was no comparison from a physical point of view.

And yet it was Edith and not Alma that he must have. Had not his father decreed it, and had he not, in a moment of weakness, accepted the decree?

Alma sat on his knee for a quarter of an hour, and then remarking that she weighed a hundred and twenty pounds and knew he must be getting tired, though he was too courteous to tell her so, rose and took a seat on the sofa opposite to him.

They talked of nothings for some time after that, acting much as lovers usually do.

"Do you really weigh a hundred and twenty?" he asked, suddenly.

"Precisely. I was weighed yesterday in the village."

"You have a very small foot for that weight."

She tried to hide the small foot under her gown, saying it was impertinent for him to notice it, and that it was not remarkably small, anyway.

"If you like small feet, you should pin your faith on Edith," she said. "She wears a whole size smaller shoe than I."

He said he did not think feet that were out of proportion made their owner any more beautiful. To this she answered that as Edith weighed only a hundred and ten, and was taller than she by several inches, her tiny feet were a great addition to her good looks.

"It's only because you like me the best," she said, as a summing up. "I feel the same about you. I

would give more for your smallest finger than for the entire body of any other person."

He laughed, for she had put him into such good humor that the headache had taken wings and flown away. He might not be able to marry this girl, but it was very agreeable indeed to know that she cared for him. He wondered if she would take it much to heart when he had to tell her that the separation was inevitable. She did not seem as if she would cry herself into a consumption. She would understand his position and not blame him for what he could not help. It would be as hard for him as for her, too, and she ought to feel that.

When should he tell her? Not yet, at least. Not before Edith came home. He pictured to himself a week without either of them, and it looked like a very dismal prospect.

Alma saw that he had become thoughtful and she tried to rally him, with only partial success.

"If any one should try to separate us," he said, as they were standing at the door, "what would you do?"

"Keep my word," was her calm answer.

"Supposing your parents objected. Supposing they said to you that they would never consent?"

Knowing that her father and mother fully approved of her choice, this did not give the girl any uneasiness, and her reply was prompt.

"I should feel that the matter was one—the only one perhaps in the world—in which I was justified in disregarding their wishes."

"But," he persisted, "if they told you that such a marriage would forever cut you off from them—that



they would never afterward recognize you as their child?"

She put her round arms about his neck in all her innocent truth and love.

"I should take you against them all, Gerald, for I should feel that they were abusing the claim of relationship when they tried to make my life unhappy."

He stooped and kissed her, wondering what there was in him to make so beautiful a being show this devotion.

Then he went to his home, with his problem farther than ever from solution.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### CUTTING THE MILL-BANK.

Edith wrote to Gerald twice each week, and he answered her as often. He had been trying to accustom himself to thinking of her as an inevitable partner for life, and the letters constituted a sort of practice in ante-matrimonial confidences. With the contrariness which seems a part of some natures he had begun to like Edith less from the moment when his father had selected her as the girl who must be his wife. He still liked her a great deal, but the parental direction to take her detracted from that fondness which formerly made it impossible to tell any difference between her and Alma.

There *was* a difference now, and it was all in favor of the magnetic creature who held his senses in thrall whenever he was in her presence, whose face and

voice and the touch of whose hand followed him even to his dreams. But he wrote to Edith such letters as he used to write when he first went to school, joined to a few more tender things which he thought the coming conditions warranted. Her letters to him were sweet and tender, without anything like passion—merely the missives of a pure girl to the one she loves and trusts and in whom she has never thought of having the least doubt.

Little more was said by Gerald and his father to each other about the impending sale of their home. The violent opposition of Mr. Garston to the Adamses shut out all hopes of rescue that his son had formed in that quarter, and there was no other part of the horizon in which they could discern a ray of light. As far as either of them could see, an evening was coming very soon when they would have to find another shelter. Gerald had been so unaccustomed to thinking for himself in money matters that he relied upon his father to point out his path when the crash should come. Mr. Garston, foreseeing that all he could raise would not suffice to satisfy the charges due on his property, had provided as well for the immediate future as he could by keeping all he received, and thus there was a few hundred dollars ready for immediate necessities. They would have time "to look about" and decide what it was best to try to do.

Gerald passed his time as he had hitherto done, visiting Alma, writing to Edith and lying at full length in the hammock under the trees in the orchard. There seemed little use in studying law books when it was so unlikely that he should ever get back into the office of Thurston & Thurston.

Things went on in this way till just a week before the auction was announced, when a rumor flew through the town that Garston had begun to carry out his threat of tearing down the bank of the brook, as it passed his land on the way to the reservoir.

Gerald and Alma had gone on a stroll through the woods on the morning when this news startled the inhabitants of Jefferson. Nearly everybody else in the town heard of it and the road leading to the vicinity was thronged with eager sight-seers within the next hour. Some of the people who came sympathized with Adams, some with Garston, some were free in their expressions that both of them were fools, and the great majority cared for nothing whatever but to see "the fun." It was not a very large job that had to be done to turn the waters of the stream upon Garston's land and let it flow past the artificial reservoir into its natural course. Six good diggers with picks and shovels, who could tear away the bank and use the materials to dam the current on one side could do the work in two or three hours. Garston had this number at work, eagerly assisting them with his own hands, directing the labor at the same time in a low voice, and seeming not to notice the crowd that came to stand and comment. It was the most exciting episode that Jefferson had ever had in its entire history, corresponding to a great railway strike or mill-lockout in a larger centre.

"He's doing it this time, Alvah," said an old man, who came up to the grist-mill. "You ought to see the dirt fly! By twelve o'clock he will have all the

water in the brook run off, and your mill will stand as still as a post."

"Do you think so, Howlett?" was the quiet response.

"Think so!" retorted the old man. "Yes, and so would you if you had been over there. I'm sorry, on my word, for the mill is really a blessing to the neighborhood, as I've said all along. Perhaps after the farm is sold you can make arrangements with whoever buys it to fill up the bank again, but it will take a good deal of time. One man can tear it down faster than twenty could build it up. This is a bad time of year for you to be idle, with all the new wheat ready to grind. I heard, too, that you were going to put in another set of machinery, and I intended to bring over a load of grain to-morrow myself."

Mr. Adams heard the garrulous old man with patience. When he had finished, he said to him:

"Howlett, do I usually boast a great deal?"

"Why, no, sir, I can't say that you do."

"Well, then, listen a moment. Do you see that machinery revolving there?"

The old man gazed wonderingly in the direction indicated.

"Yes, sir."

"Come over at twelve o'clock," said Adams, his voice rising gradually. "Come at one, come at two, come at six to-night; come to-morrow, come the next day, and you'll find it working just as you see it now. Bring on your grain. I'll grind it. Tell your neighbors to bring theirs. I'll not keep them waiting. There's going to be more grain ground in this mill in the next two months than has ever been in three!"

Adams turned and went into the mill, and Howlett walked slowly away.

"The excitement of this thing has turned Alvah's head," he muttered, as he went along. But the strangeness of what he had heard impressed him so strongly that he walked back to where the digging was going on and repeated the prediction to the assembled multitude.

Garston, who was working like a beaver, heard it, and thought he understood. Alvah had probably sent to the judge of the court, holding a special session some miles away, to get an injunction issued against him. He whispered to his men, promising them double pay if they would work harder, and taking up his pickaxe he struck into the weakest place in the banking until the sweat rolled from him like rain.

The excitement in the crowd grew to fever heat, as the story that Howlett brought circulated and the surmises of this one and that were added to the stock of gossip. It was eleven o'clock when, with a quick blow, Garston tore away the clods that held the surging stream and a second later the released waters, breaking from their confinement like an avalanche, poured down upon the lowlands.

The crowd stood on the higher ground, on the Adams side of the stream, and they saw that the work would have its intended effect in a very short time. Almost no water flowed into the reservoir after that and the amount necessary to turn the large wheel was growing smaller every moment.

Garston leaned on his pickaxe and wiped the perspiration from his face. He felt that the time of his victory was at hand. He could see the revolving

mill-wheel from where he stood, and could gauge with tolerable accuracy the fall of the water in the reservoir.

In half an hour the wheel began to show signs of weariness. It turned slower—slower yet—and then—stopped.

The partisans of Garston, which included the villagers who were envious of his rival's prosperity—not a small portion of the crowd which had gathered—set up a wild shout of glee at this sight, and their chief smiled, with the triumph he could not conceal depicted in his grimy countenance. But the victors had only a moment in which to enjoy their success. One of the party, who was nearer to the mill than the rest, leaned over and placed one hand to his ear, in an attitude of intense attention. Others, who had thought they detected something strange in the air, stopped and listened also.

There was a whirring, buzzing sound coming from the mill, as if the machinery were still in full operation. A puzzled look overspread the faces of the crowd, and as one man they ran toward the edifice from which the sound proceeded.

Garston did not follow them. He knew what had happened. His intuition, joined to his apprehension told him what it was that made the whirring noise.

*The mill had never stopped running !*

Some other power, previously arranged for, had taken the place of the water-wheel ! !

What was it? *Steam*, of course. The heavy load that had been drawn to the mill in the night, and which he had supposed to be another set of machinery for grinding, had been an engine powerful



enough to do the work he had been at such pains to stop !

There is something in arrested triumph at the moment of apparent victory that may affect stronger minds than that of this Iowa farmer. He went into his house, overcome by the occurrence, and hid himself from everyone. He had pictured the rage of Adams and the laugh of the multitude at his discomfiture. Now the laugh would be heard, to be sure, but it was against himself that it would be turned.

He had been outwitted by the simplest of methods. Adams had chosen the most cutting way to show the superiority of his mental calibre and the endlessness of his purse. Garston felt that he had been an idiot to think that he could combat such a man, even temporarily.

Only one thing was needed to make his humiliation complete. Adams would come to the auction and buy the roof from over his head. A week from to-day there would be no lower depth of disgrace into which he could sink.

Gerald and Alma strolled back from their walk in the woods just before one o'clock. They had passed a morning together that had been to Alma as beautiful and clear as the August sky above their heads, and Gerald, notwithstanding the troubles that encircled him, had enjoyed it to the utmost. She had braided his straw hat with twining leaves, interspersed with red berries, and he had gathered a great bunch of wild flowers and pinned it to her corsage. She had sat under a tree and held his head in her lap, and he had stolen kisses from every

part of her rosy cheeks, cherry lips and rounded throat. The wild passion that had affected him in his first close intimacy with her gave way on this occasion to a contented calm, and there was nothing for which she had to reprove him, even by the mild method of a look. He was to take lunch with her, at her home, but, as she said, when they heard the distant town clock striking the hour of noon, lunch was a meal that one could take at any time. So they had waited nearly an hour more and then strolled back, under the trees, discarding the beaten paths, their arms in schoolgirl fashion about each other's waists.

Emerging into the travelled roadway they met some young people who told them what had happened.

"Well, your father cut the mill-bank at last, this morning," said one to Gerald, "and the big wheel is still."

Gerald grew pale, while Alma's face flushed with indignation.

"But *your* father," went on the gossip to Alma, "was prepared in a quite unexpected way. It seems that he had a steam engine ready. The belting had only to be shifted from one pulley to the other. The mill never stopped a second, not even for the usual noon hour."

The newsvenders passed on. When he was sure that they were out of hearing Gerald stopped in the middle of the street.

"Alma, my dear girl, this is going to make trouble for us," he said.

She answered with a nod, for she was afraid to trust her voice.

"Whatever be the cause, my father is incensed against yours to a fearful extent. He has had bad luck in everything, as perhaps you know. I was not told of it till very lately. His disappointments have warped his mind, I am afraid, and this affair will not make him any milder in his feelings toward your people. I must try and tell you everything, now that I have begun. He has asked—really commanded me—to have nothing more to do with you."

He paused and found her regarding him with a face that seemed made of stone.

"Well," she said, "why have you not obeyed him?"

"Because I cannot. Because you have been dear to me too long to make it possible. But something must be done to tide over this temporary difficulty. He is absolutely without reason in the matter. If you will help me, we can arrange it all right. Until there is some improvement in his feelings we must not be seen publicly together."

She sighed deeply.

"If you love me, Gerald, I will do anything that is reasonable. But tell me first, do you think your father justified in trying to injure mine in the wanton way he attempted this morning, and do you think my father wrong in taking methods to protect himself?"

He hesitated a moment before he answered her.

"Let us not try to settle that question," he said, finally. "You love your father; I love mine. It is not for us to criticise their acts. And remember this, also: My father, a week from to-night, will not have a house to call his own, while yours is a prosperous man with large possessions. I cannot

see yet what the end will be. I shall have to give up the law, for one thing, and seek for work in some common business."

"Oh, no, you must not do that!" she cried, in protest. "You must take money enough—not from my father, but from me—to finish your term and place yourself in the position to which you have aspired. It is nothing that you should be ashamed of. Your success is as dear to me as to you. I am an only child and my father will do anything I ask."

Gerald's pride was hurt again. It was ridiculous that a mere girl should have it in her power to offer him the means to live upon! Something was the matter with a world in which there could be such a reversed state of things.

"We must pass the first bridge in this emergency," he answered, "before we try those which follow. In the meantime, if I am obliged to keep away from your house, or to ask you to meet me secretly, you will not blame me, now that you know the truth. There is a flat stone on the wall near the entrance to your driveway, that is moveable. I will put a letter there when I am able to meet you, and will look for your replies in the same place. And now we must part here, as my father will wonder what is keeping me away."

Sadly the young girl took the bunch of wild-flowers from her waist and dropped them over a hedge by the roadside. She took the hat from his head and removed the wreath also.

"They would attract attention," she explained. "Oh, Gerald, how long must we act as if we were doing something disreputable?"

"Not long," he answered, cheerfully. "But for the present you will readily admit that we have a divided duty."

No one was in sight, and they were standing where a little clump of trees shielded them from sudden surprise. Gerald took the woeful face between his hands and brought the lips into contact with his own.

"Are you sure you love me?" she whispered. "If there is ever to be any doubt of it, I had rather know it now."

He drew her close to his breast and kissed her again and again.

"If you had consented to my proposal for a secret marriage, you would not find such ideas creeping into your head," he replied.

"How would that have made any difference?" she asked, innocently. "A ceremony of marriage would only hold where the heart went with the words. If you truly love me nothing else is necessary."

"Does it seem so to you?" said he. "That shows the way a woman reasons. If it would please me very much—if I was sure that it would be the wisest and best thing—are you certain that you could never consent? I see before me a very bleak prospect. I am to be turned out of the house where I was born, perhaps compelled to labor in the fields like a common workman. There is nothing in my whole horizon that contains a ray of light but you. If you were truly my own—if you would become my wife, from whom nothing could part me—I would even consent to take the money you have offered, for there would then be no disgrace in it."

As he spoke he drew her to him tighter yet, until she could feel something of the torrent that surged through his veins.

"Alma, I am no angel, and only your love—strong, real, true—can keep me right. Why should you insist on a technical point when so much is at stake?"

He had almost hypnotized her with his eyes, his lips and his embrace, but the womanly sense that was in her still held out.

"It is a thing to think of a good while," she answered. "I cannot bear to deceive my parents, who have never refused me anything since I can remember. If it becomes imperative that we should be married without waiting for you to finish your studies, I had rather go directly to them and state the case. Their only aim would be to make me happy. I am almost sure that they would not object when they understood everything."

This was not at all what he wanted. It would precipitate a collision with his father—and with Edith. He wanted a private union, which could be kept from the knowledge of the world for a long time. This would enable him to dispose of the obstacles in his way at his leisure. Gerald did not want a prosaic marriage now, with a wealthy father-in-law doling him out the cash he needed, as though he were ten years of age. He thought there would be something charming, too, in a secret union with such a girl as Alma.

But the town clock had struck one, and he had to tear himself away for the present, at least. He told her that they would both have to think of this matter at their leisure, when their minds were calm. **She was pleased with this tone, and they parted**



with less feeling on her part than she would otherwise have had, that she must maintain a sort of antagonism against him, for her own preservation.

"I will leave you a note later in the day," he said, as she left him. "Don't fail to keep an appointment, if I am able to make one."

Alma did little that afternoon but watch the wall that bounded the estate on the street side, which she could see plainly from her music-room window. It was nearly six when Gerald passed, and paused, apparently to break off a flower from a vine that clung to the rock. When he was out of sight she tripped nervously to the place and lifted the flat stone. But her heart beat faster than ever and her cheek grew crimson when she read the note :

"MY DARLING : Meet me at the summer-house in the wood, at eight o'clock. Bring the key. Do not hesitate. Everything depends on your presence there.  
G."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

"IT IS EDITH, OF COURSE."

John Garston had not been the most agreeable man in Jefferson for a number of years. He had been noted for his short answers, his disinclination to take part in any gathering, his way of driving or walking along the road as though he saw no one and wanted no one to see him. But from the day

when the steam engine began its work his manners were even more surly than before. He acted as if every man whom he met were his personal enemy, never replying to the "good-morning" with which old acquaintances greeted him, and transacting what little business he had to do in an ill-natured pantomime. In this way he lost what sympathy he had had among the villagers and became most cordially detested before the time for the auction arrived.

Little by little he learned, from bits of conversation that he overheard, how deeply Alvah had laid his plans after he found that his enemy had determined to tap the brook. He had brought to his mill not only a powerful engine, but enough machinery to double its grinding capacity. As the only fuel of the vicinity was wood, and as this was not over plenty, he had bought quietly, through an agent, all the available stock in town, and had made a contract for a large amount to be delivered in the future as wanted. It was much cheaper to run his mill with water, of course, than with steam, but the engine would not prove altogether a loss. There were several months in the year when the old power had been insufficient, and with the increased machinery this time would be increased. And another element in the scheme of the mill-owner was developed the first time a new customer came with a load of wheat for grinding.

"I shall take out an additional quart for my toil after this," said Adams to him, handing him a rate-card as he spoke. "I have ground at a lower tariff than I ought, having the water-power to rely on, but the price will be increased hereafter. Machinery is

dear, and wood is costly, and I do not see why I should bear the loss when the cost of grinding has been enhanced through no fault of mine."

The man, one of those who shouted when he saw the bank of the brook demolished, looked anything but pleased.

"I suppose there's no law compelling us to come here," he growled.

"No. And I should not grind any more for the public except for accommodation. It nets me a little more to buy wheat and grind altogether for myself."

This was not long in being spread broadcast. Some who heard it were indignant at Adams, declaring that he was a bloated monopolist, bent on the destruction of his poorer neighbors. But the majority traced the trouble directly to the act of John Garston and heaped their maledictions on him as the cause of this injury to the farming industry of Jefferson County.

"You know what wheat was worth when Alvah started that mill," said one of them, in a knot that gathered in the evening at the post-office, "and how it went up as soon as he began to grind. We were wholly at the mercy of the buyers, until this mill gave us a double market. You may talk of monopoly till you are tired, but I tell you if there was ever a man of public spirit it is that Alvah Adams. He has taken the smallest tolls of any miller in the State, when he might have had twice as much if there had been anything mean about him!"

"What do you say to this increase, that's the question?" put in another.

"I say it's right. I say the man would be a fool

if he had done anything else. What do you suppose it cost him to put that engine in? And what will be his bill for wood in the course of a year? Do you think he wants that to come out of his own pocket? Would any of *you* do it? No, I'll bet you wouldn't," he added, as no one seemed able to satisfactorily answer his numerous conundrums. "If you want to blame any one, blame Garston. If you pay extra tolls, lay it to *him*. He's your man! He's done it!"

"Sh!" called a listener, in a low voice. "There he is now."

"I don't care!" was the sharp retort, as John entered the shop. "I'd as lief say it to him as to you!"

Garston had heard it all. Coming to the steps of the store he had stopped to read a bulletin that was nailed outside the door, and the harsh use of his name had come to his ears as plainly as to those of the others. He said nothing in response to the affront cast upon him, but looked in his box, took the mail offered him and departed. What did he care whether this man or that in the village approved of what he had done? He had no intention of remaining among them after his farm was sold. He found a grain of comfort, even in his hatred of Alvah, in the reflection that they would all have to pay more than they had ever done to get their wheat turned into flour.

On the road which led to his home he met the handsome carriage that Adams rode in, with its smart driver, and saw that Adams and his wife occupied the main seat. The dust from the highway rose as they approached, covering him with its choking cloud. He fixed his eyes on the ground, and

pretended not to see them, but before he could do so he had caught a vision of the frail woman whose love he had coveted and for whom he had thrown a life away, that might with her, he fondly imagined, have been worth something to him. Alvah had her—he had lands unincumbered by mortgage—seventeen hundred acres and more now—a mill whose power no one could interfere with—money beside—everything that he could desire. And the foot passenger, whose form he covered with the dust of his carriage, and who had started in life on precisely the same level as he, had—nothing!

No! The dust-covered figure raised himself a little. Alvah did *not* have everything he wanted. He had never had a *son*! In that one thing alone the penniless tramp surpassed him. He wanted now to gain the boy that he might make him one of his family—that he might put him in the place of a child of his own. John knew from a hundred sources that Adams had set his heart on a marriage between his daughter and Gerald, and he had nothing left now to live for except to disappoint him in that hope. Gerald would obey him. He had promised to break whatever friendship he had with Alma, and he would keep his word. Alvah Adams could sue for his son in vain. His handsome daughter—so like what her mother was at her age—might fade and pine for the love she craved, as he had pined for the love of her mother, but he would be obdurate. Alvah could have his acres and his cash, but the one thing that his child wanted to make her a happy woman it was in the power of his crushed neighbor to withhold.

On the morning when the sale of his farm was to take place, Mr. Garston had a brief talk with Gerald.

"You have heard, of course," he said, "everybody has heard, about my failure to stop his mill." There was no need of anything more than the pronoun to explain who was meant. "I expect that he will buy the farm. He has bought everything that has been offered for sale about here for years. Let him have it. Let him take the ground which I turned over with my breaking plow when he and I were poor together. Let him take this house, where I have lived for so long, and use it—as he will—for his laborers. I don't care. But don't forget your promise, my boy, about his daughter. Let him not boast at least, that he has beaten me with my own son as his assistant. You have told me what you will do, and I rely upon you implicitly."

Gerald said "Yes, sir," and that ended the conversation. His feelings toward Alma had undergone many changes during the past few days. The meeting which he had arranged in the summer-house was not carried out as he had planned, for one thing. Alma came to the wood at the hour appointed in his note, but it was to tell him that she had purposely neglected to bring the keys to the gate and dwelling, as she could conceive of no message that he had to give her which could not be told equally well under the shadow of the trees outside. This threw him into a fit of sulks which he could not wholly conceal, and in response to her earnest request to tell what had offended him, he reiterated his former charge of her lack of faith in him. He said it made him miserable to feel that she distrusted him at every point.



"You ought to know that a man has some pride," said he, in an injured tone. "I asked you to bring the keys. If you loved me as truly as I love you these precautions would not enter your head. You would only say to yourself, 'Gerald wishes it, and that is reason enough for me.' If the case were reversed you would not find me quibbling about trifles."

He hurt her more than he meant to, but she tried to answer him gravely :

"I can understand that a man may have pride," she said, "but a woman should also have a little. To go into that summer-house with you at this hour would subject us to the scorn of any person who might discover it. For your sake as well as my own I thought it wise to disregard your request, and if you think it over you will admit that I am right."

He did not know how to combat this statement, which he knew did her honor, but it was not in his mood to make concessions.

"What did you want to tell me?" she asked, seeing that he still seemed unhappy.

"I only wanted to talk things over. We can't hold a private conversation here, where any passer-by may hear us. I don't know but my father might take it into his head to stroll this way. There would be an end of everything between him and me if he saw me with you."

"Is he so severe as that?"

"Yes. He has not only forbidden me to speak to you again, but he has been so kind as to tell me just the person on whom my affections should centre."

Then, as she regarded him with an inquiring look he said, half on account of the hateful temper that was on him—

"It is Edith, of course."

Alma looked thoughtfully at the ground near her feet.

"He does not even propose to consult her, it seems."

"Why," he asked, unguardedly, "do you doubt that she would accept me?"

"I cannot tell," she answered, while an expression of pain flitted across her brow. "She has known my sentiments toward you for a long time, though we have never spoken a word on the matter, and it would probably take her by surprise if any one should couple you and her in that way. Somehow I never can think of Edie as a married woman. She seems destined to become one of those dear, lovable old maids that the world cannot get along without."

This touched his pride again, in a new place. He did not want Alma to think that she was the only girl who had ever fallen in love with him, and yet he did not know exactly how to enlighten her.

"So you don't think Edith would have had me if I had gone to her instead of you?" he said. "I wish I were at liberty to tell you something—"

He stopped short, with that air of wisdom which usually accompanies an insinuation of this sort, and an added sadness came to the face of Alma.

"If she loves you, I am very sorry for her," she said, simply. "I do not see how I could have been so blind as not to notice. But perhaps I was so full of my own love," she added, "that I could see nothing else."

This confession was sufficient balm to his wounded vanity, and he rewarded her for it with a kiss. They remained in the wood an hour or so longer, and then he took her back to the neighborhood of her father's house, and they parted with mutual expressions of endearment.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### BUYING A SON-IN-LAW.

Never had an auction in or near Jefferson drawn such an audience as assembled when Si Wilmot stood upon a chair under one of the big trees and proceeded to read the power of sale mortgage under which he proposed to dispose of the Garston farm. Not three persons in the entire party had the remotest intention of putting in a bid, or had the means to do so had they been ever so willing, but this did not prevent them from elbowing each other for good locations near the chair on which Wilmot stood, and standing with wide open mouths drinking in each word of his as though it were heavenly manna.

No one had any doubt that Alvah Adams would own the farm when the sale was over, and they turned occasionally to watch him as he sat in his carriage a little out of the crowd, looking pale and firm, like a man who means to have what he has set out for. The agent of the Iowa Investment Company was also pointed out, though most of the farmers present knew his face only too well. His corpor-

ation had encumbrances on some of the best pieces of land in that section, and he was noted for his promptness in collecting interest for the Eastern capitalists who were his employers.

Garston stood with Gerald at the front door of the house, both of them showing the mental strain under which they were laboring. Everybody was relieved when the voice of the auctioneer broke the stillness.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am under the painful necessity of offering to the highest bidder here to-day this estate which has long been the abode of one of your esteemed townsmen. I say painful, because no one likes to see a farm wrested from a man who has met with reverses. And I must say also at this time, that it is not the policy of the Iowa Investment Company to dispossess any mortgagor of theirs who is able to pay his interest, even though the time may have passed in which he agreed to pay the principal. The principal represented here has been overdue for the past nine years. It is because of the failure of the mortgagor to pay the interest, gentlemen, that we are obliged to sell this property."

The agent of the Investment Company whispered to Wilmot to go on with his sale, and to let further praise of his employers go till some other time.

"The agent of the mortgagees in this case has just informed me that he is willing to start the bidding at the amount of the mortgage and interest," said Mr. Wilmot, unblushingly, though no one in the assembly had the least doubt of the different import of the whispered directions. "Mr. Grosschen, then offers three thousand one hundred and nine dollars. He does not, however, wish to buy the estate, and will not bid against any one else."

While the crowd was trying to admire the magnanimity of Mr. Grosschen, as thus set forth, a sensation was caused by the arrival of a rapidly driven carriage. It was the private vehicle of Colonel Staples, and that gentleman himself occupied it. The horses bore signs of having been put to their best speed, being covered with foam which flew from every part of them as they were suddenly pulled up in the midst of the lawn party.

The Colonel had an anxious look as he surveyed the auctioneer and sprang unaided to the ground.

"Has the sale begun?" he asked those about him.

"Just one bid," said old Howlett, as spokesman for the rest.

The auctioneer began to read the mortgage deed, as a matter of form, describing the premises to be sold. As Colonel Staples glanced about the crowd his eye met that of Mr. Adams, sitting upright as a ramrod in his carriage. They nodded with something less than their usual affability. Without exactly knowing why, each suspected that the other had designs not in consonance with his own plans that day.

The Colonel found what he sought at last. It was Gerald. He attracted the attention of the young man and motioned to him to come a little apart from the others.

"I came here to see if there was anything I could do for you," he said, taking Gerald by the arm. "We only arrived in town an hour ago, and just heard of this sale by accident. Edith was with me when I got the news, and she said, Don't waste a minute, father. Buy the farm, do anything that is necessary to help him.' And here I am, in good time, as it appears."

Quite overcome with surprise at the generosity of the Colonel, Gerald could hardly answer.

"Let me ask father," he stammered. "I will return in a moment."

As quickly as he could convey the information, Gerald told his father why Colonel Staples had come, and a ray of light lit up the features of the discouraged man.

"I will see him," he whispered. "Stay where you are."

The crowd was not unobservant of these consultations, and gossip began to circulate the rumor that Colonel Staples had arrived with money to pay up the interest and stop the sale. Alvah Adams heard these surmises passed from mouth to mouth, and his countenance darkened.

John Garston heard from the Colonel's own lips what he had already said to Gerald and thanked him quietly.

"There's nothing you can do except to buy it," said he. "The Investment Company wouldn't stop the sale now even if all the interest was paid, and the principal on top of that. I've inquired. It's against their policy. When they have advertised a sale it has to come off. It is a good bit of land and you could afford to pay more than their claim."

"There's a second mortgage of fifteen hundred, too," said Staples.

"Yes, but the first holds. I expected to see Davidson here, to protect his interest."

"I represent him," said Colonel Staples, not thinking it a time to go into particulars. "Well, Mr. Garston, I'll buy the place and arrange with you to remain, if you wish. Edith told me to do whatever you



desired. You understand, sir, that my daughter's request has brought me here. Do you think there is likely to be much of a contest?"

The farmer looked across the lawn to where Adams was.

"The only one who'll bid against you," he said, "is that man in the carriage. He is here from hate, as you are from good-will. His daughter had her heart set on Gerald, and I have forbidden him to see her. He wants to get the farm, to hold it over our heads. No one but you can prevent him."

Saying this, Garston abruptly left the Colonel, and returned to the place which he had originally occupied. The auctioneer had finished reading his document and had also given a glowing description of the premises which he was offering.

"And for this farm, with its buildings, as it now stands," he said in summing up, "I am offered three thousand, one hundred and nine dollars by the agent of the mortgagees. Does any one bid higher?"

Colonel Staples stepped forward.

"Representing a second mortgage of fifteen hundred and seventy-five dollars, reckoning interest due, I bid that amount in addition to the sum you name," he said.

There was a little surprise at this. Wilmot took up a shingle which some one handed him and did his figuring.

"That makes forty-six hundred and eighty-four dollars that I am offered," he announced. Then, after the manner of auctioneers from time immemorial, he proceeded to tell his auditors that such a farm never was offered for such a small sum, in any age or country. "Forty-six, eighty-four," he con-

tinued, consulting the shingle. "Forty-six, eighty-four. Does any one say forty-seven?"

Mr. Adams, from his place in the carriage, raised his hand. The crowd was delighted at the motion. It augured a lively contest, and that is what they hoped to see. Colonel Staples came nearer to the auctioneer's chair. Wilmot had barely repeated the bid when the Colonel nodded to him sharply.

"Forty-seven hundred, forty-eight I'm offered," cried Wilmot. He looked toward Adams. "Forty-nine, sir?"

"Five thousand," came the words of the mill-owner.

It was certainly becoming interesting. Mr. Garston and Gerald looked on with breathless interest. Much to them would depend on the next few moments.

"Five thousand I'm bid," said the auctioneer. "Do you say—"

"Six," shouted the Colonel, in a clear voice.

"Seven," came with equal clearness from the carriage where Mr. Adams sat.

There was a pause. Every judge of real estate in the crowd knew that the actual value of the farm had been exceeded, and that future offerings on the part of these men were actuated by other considerations. The auctioneer began to get warm. The ordinary mortgage sale did not furnish such an episode as this.

"Seven thousand for this farm," he repeated. "Seven thousand." He looked toward Colonel Staples, who said "Seventy-five." He looked back at Mr. Adams, who said, "Eight thousand," but the words came indistinctly, and some one near the car-

riage had to repeat them. Fifty dollars an acre for Jefferson farms had hitherto been a thing unheard of, and the buildings on this one were old and dilapidated. Colonel Staples uttered the single word "nine," and Adams signalled to his driver to leave.

"Nine thousand!" shouted Wilmot. "Is there any other bid? Nine thousand once; nine thousand twice; third and last call—and sold to Colonel Staples for nine thousand."

A murmur of derision went through the crowd as it parted to let the steeds that drew the Adams carriage pass by. The feelings of its occupant were not softened by this demonstration, and before he reached the gate he was in the worst possible mood to meet John Garston, who had hastened there before him.

"I'm going to stay here in spite of you, you see!" he exclaimed, with a look of triumph on his face. "The farm is mine still! Tell that to your wife, damn you! Tell it to your daughter! Tell Alma that Gerald will marry Edith—"

He could say no more, for Adams, beside himself with rage, sprang from his carriage and struck him full in the forehead with his fist. He wore a heavy seal ring that he did not take into account when delivering the blow, and it cut deeply into the flesh, releasing a stream of blood that coursed down over Garston's eyes, completely blinding him for the moment.

Gerald had seen that something was going on and came hurrying to the spot just in time to witness this action. Waiting not a second he threw himself upon Adams and bore him violently to the ground.

The whole affair occupied so little time that those who saw it had no chance to interfere. But now a

dozen hands grasped the young man and pulled him from the prostrate form, while others assisted Adams, who was much dazed, to regain his feet. Another party lent handkerchiefs to Garston and bound up his head, and Colonel Staples came up with his carriage and offered to take him to the nearest physician's, as it was evident that several stitches would have to be taken in his wound.

"Don't touch him !" cried Garston to Gerald, seeing that his son was kept with difficulty from again assaulting Adams. "He wanted to get my home away and when that failed he tried to kill me, but let him be ! Only—remember ! Remember, when this day is past, that he gave me this blow !"

Gerald was forced into the Colonel's carriage, while Adams, in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, was driven home. After Garston's hurt had been attended to, the Colonel persuaded Gerald to go with him for a few moments to his own house, saying that there was one there who was very anxious to see him after so long a separation.

Brief as had been the time since the assault, rumor had already carried it to the Staples mansion. The story had reached there in two forms—one of which made it appear that it was Gerald himself who had been injured, and he found Edith in a highly excitable state. She ran to the carriage to meet him, satisfied herself hastily that he was unhurt, accepted the embrace which the presence of her parents did not prevent him offering her, and then fainted in his arms.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“YOU DO NOT KNOW MY FATHER.”

There were many sad hours for Gerald on the days that followed. He deeply regretted the rash conduct of his father, and was filled with mortification at the way his name had been mixed with Edith's before that thoughtless crowd. But even at the moment when the fair girl lay in his embrace, giving him a clearer insight into the deep love she bore him than he had ever had, his mind was far astray. It was upon that other one, whose parent he had thrown to the earth, and who must now be undergoing the severest pangs as she listened to the story of the altercation. He carried Edith into the parlor and placed her on a sofa, where she soon recovered consciousness. And when the rest of the family, seeing that she needed no help, had discreetly retired, he sat by her side, holding her hand and even kissing her pale cheek occasionally, as he recounted, in as mild a manner as the facts would bear, what he thought best of the afternoon occurrence.

“Poor Alma!” said Edith, when she had heard him through. “It will be very sad for her. I must go and see her in the morning. Do you think the hurt to your father will be a serious one?”

“Not to his body,” said Gerald, “but to his mind it will be serious indeed. He has cherished an enmity to Mr. Adams for a long time, and this wound will not help him forget it. I will tell you something more, as a secret. He has already expressed in the

strongest terms his wish that I should never speak to Alma again."

Edith, to whom this news was not wholly unexpected, responded that she was very sorry, and hoped that he would relent.

"I do not see how he can carry his spite—forgive me if the word seems strong—against Mr. Adams to such an extent as to visit it upon Alma. Surely she is not to be held accountable for the differences between him and her father. I shall go to see him and try to talk him out of it."

Gerald smiled at the idea that she could have any influence with this man, whom he, his only son, could not pretend to affect in the least.

"You do not know my father, or you would not cherish any such notion as that," he replied.

The girl blushed as she recollected the former conversations that she and John Garston had held.

"I know him quite well," she replied, "and he has always had a liking for me. When he has passed others with only a nod or a word, he has stopped to spend five minutes in talking to me. He knows, to some extent, too, how much I care for you, and that ought to count."

The young man winced at these words. He remembered again the disagreeable way in which his father had arranged this matter, and it hurt him. He wondered what had passed between him and the Colonel, when they went off together, before the bidding by the latter began. Everybody in Jefferson would know that the farm had been bought by Staples solely on account of the understood intentions of his daughter and Gerald. It was very aggravating to have things turn out in this way.



Gerald still had a deep regard for Edith, but he felt that at this time Alma was the one who needed his sympathy, and do what he might he could not get her out of his mind.

Mrs. Staples came in and asked him, in a way that he could hardly decline, to remain to tea, and Edith managed to get to the table, where she was placed as usual at his side. The Colonel was wise enough to turn the conversation upon matters unconnected with the events of the day, principally the excursion he and his family had been taking.

"We had a lovely time," said he, "at least Mrs. S. and I did. Edie, I fear, was too anxious to get back to Jefferson, for some reason, to enjoy things to their full extent."

"On the contrary," replied Edith, "I had a delightful trip. Of course it is pleasant to get home again, though I shall have but a little while before school begins. Just think how soon it will be, Gerald, before we shall all be starting again for Chicago."

Gerald thought this a good opportunity to free himself of what had been for a long time on his mind.

"You and Alma will have to do without me hereafter, I fear," said he. "It looks as if my law education was at an end."

"How is that?" asked Colonel Staples, while the others looked at the young man, as if they could not believe their hearing.

"Why, everybody knows that we are as poor as any church mouse now," was the reply. "It has come upon me all at once, my father having been too kind in keeping his troubles to himself as long as he could, but I am quite reconciled. I shall have to go to work and get my living."

Colonel Staples put down a cup of tea that he was raising to his lips.

"What nonsense the boy is talking!" he cried, good-naturedly. "Have you no friends whom you can call upon? Do you think we are going to see you throw up a career in this way for want of a few paltry dollars of temporary assistance?"

The Colonel was not in the habit of thinking of the American Dollar in connection with the word "paltry," and Gerald knew it. He found himself in danger of being surrounded by another set of barriers, from which he would have difficulty in escaping. Whatever bargain his father had made, he would not so soon, at least, become a party to it, and he answered, with some spirit, that he could not think of being beholden to any one; that he would rather look his fate in the face, and take the position in life which his reduced circumstances pointed out.

Edith sat a silent, but most interested listener to this conversation. She heard her father offer to lend Gerald all the money he needed, or to make such arrangements with Mr. Garston, Sr., as would amount to the same thing. Gerald would not yield, however.

"I am better prepared," he said, finally, "to consider your proposal, because I have already had it in similar form from another source."

Colonel Staples, his wife and Edith stared at their guest. Who could have been so generous? They gave up the conundrum instantly, and asked him directly if he would impart the name of this would-be benefactor.

"Oh, I thought you would have guessed it at once," he said with nonchalance. "It was Mr.

Adams, of course. I don't think he would renew it, after what has occurred to-day," he added, with an attempt to be humorous, "but he made me the offer, in good faith, a fortnight ago. I thought there were reasons why I ought to decline to accept it and I did so."

"But those reasons do not exist in my case," interposed the Colonel, quickly. "You have done yourself honor thus far, as I view it. Now it is quite another thing. I feel toward you as though you were a son of my own, and I cannot bear that you should give up your bright prospects when everything can be so easily arranged."

The speaker then launched into the description of a plan that he had formulated, by which Mr. Garston was to have the farm reconveyed to him, under a mortgage large enough to enable him to pay every dollar of his debts and have enough left for a working capital. Instead of the fifteen and twenty per cent. interest that he had been compelled to pay, only eight per cent.—the lowest rate ever known then in that section—was to be charged. This would enable him to send his son to the law school, and with care he might in time remove all the incumbrances from his estate.

Gerald heard him but imperfectly. He thought of the ridiculousness of these two capitalists of Jefferson bidding for him against each other. He had loved both of the girls all his life, but he thought he should learn to hate them if this sort of thing went on much longer.

"Let me think of it," he said, as he rose from the table. "I cannot tell to-night what I will do."

Edith followed him alone to the gate, and he

embraced her there in the semi-darkness, as he felt he ought. Beautiful as ever, with new proof of her love in every glance that she gave him, the money that her father was shaking before his eyes came between them. As her mouth touched his,—that shy mouth that had seemed too reserved for such things until so lately,—he thought the delicate trembling of the lips could never be felt by any other man this side the grave. Such love as hers is apt to come but once and build its nest to endure all storms and seasons.

He went where he could see Alma's home. There was a lowered light in her chamber. He guessed that she had heard the tidings, with what bitter additions he knew not, and that it had prostrated her. Instantly remorse took hold of him. He would have given a year of his life could he have scaled that veranda undiscovered, peeped in at that blind, lifted that window and thrown his arms around her as she lay there, that she might shed her tears against the heart that caused them.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE NATURE OF A GIRL.

Alma Adams was as much excited as Edith had been when she heard of the assault. She was naturally of a more self-reliant disposition, and ordinarily would have borne any bad news with

greater equanimity, but this was so terrible that it quite upset her. She learned the truth from her father soon after he reached home, for he thought it wisest to let her gain her information from him than to receive it second hand from others, and possibly in a garbled shape. She was sitting anxiously on the veranda when he drove in at the gate, and as his carriage stopped at the steps she hastened to meet him.

"Did you buy it?" she asked, hardly waiting till the coachman was out of hearing.

Her breath came in short gasps and every lineament in her face showed the anxiety with which she uttered the question.

"No, Alma, I did not," he replied, and she had time to notice that he wore an appearance of extreme nervousness. "The place was sold to Colonel Staples."

She looked the image of extreme surprise.

"Was *he* there? I did not know he had reached home. What did he want of it? How much did he pay? Tell me everything," she said, rapidly.

"Wait a minute." He seemed to want strength. "I have a very disagreeable story to tell, and I need time. Get me an easy chair."

Alma flew into the music-room, through the low window, and returned with the article desired. Then she seated herself by his side, and waited.

"I don't know where to begin," said her father, clearing his throat of an obstruction that stuck there tenaciously. He put one arm around her and drew her to his side, as if to keep something from hurting her. "I have bad news, my child—bad news—for you."

Her lips formed the words "For me?" but she uttered no sound.

"Alma," said Mr. Adams, with an effort, "you must think no more of Gerald."

She swayed a little under his arm, but asked him why, in a voice that surprised him by its firmness.

"He is to marry Edith. John told me so before a crowd of them, in the most insulting manner. Staples bought the farm and them with it. I would not have believed it of him, but I saw it with my own eyes. It was this way:"

Again he cleared his throat, and she did not move.

"I had told Gerald that I would buy the place, and after cutting off merely enough to protect the brook I would deed the rest to him, so that his father could remain there if he chose. Just as the sale began Staples drove up. He left his carriage and called Gerald aside. Then Gerald went for his father and he and Staples had a confab. When John left Staples he looked over to me with an expression that said, 'I don't need any of your help.' The bidding began. I bid five thousand dollars—more than the place was worth—and he bid six. I bid seven, and he five hundred more. Then I said eight and he said nine. There was no use. He would have paid the last cent he had rather than have allowed me to beat him, and I let it go. He was buying more than a farm—he was buying a son-in-law as well—and he could afford to pay high!"

Adams had raised his voice toward the end of his speech, until it could have been heard by any person within two hundred feet. Alma's only action was to put her hand gently upon his lips, as a signal to him



that he was speaking too loud, having done which she waited for him to proceed.

"I thought of you, Alma, as the bidding went on. I knew, my girl, that you loved him, but I did not believe that you would think it becoming in me to buy you a husband in the public market, where every spectator could see that he was the real article over which the contest was being waged. There is too much of the Adams blood in you for that. You have the pride that goes with your race on both sides. Staples paid five thousand for the farm and four for Gerald. I thought him too dear at that figure. Tell me, Alma, was I not right?"

The daughter inclined her head. Her brain was whirling. Her heart beat like a trip-hammer. She was afraid to make any pronounced demonstration lest she should betray the extent of her emotion.

"But I have not told you all," her father went on, "though it is really of small moment, except for the disgrace of such an occurrence. When John snarled out the particulars of the bargain,—when he threw it at me before them all that his son was to marry Edith, and told me to tell you of it—I forgot myself and—and struck him. This ring was in the way and cut his forehead." He showed her the jewel, still red from the blood he had drawn. "At that moment Gerald came up and threw me down. Then we were separated and I came home. I was ashamed of the part I had played as soon as I had time to think, but I couldn't help doing it. John was fearfully exasperating."

Alma rose feebly, saying that she would go to her room for a little while, and her father went to tell his wife something of what had occurred.

"Go up and see if there is anything she needs," he said. "You can talk to her better than I can. Tell her to forget him—to put him out of her mind and never let him come there again. He and his father have outraged our feelings. She will see that nothing more can ever occur between them and us."

When she came down, an hour later, the thin, pale face of the invalid wife and mother was turned toward her husband with its usual mildness of expression.

"I have tried to console her," she said, "but you must not under estimate the shock. She loves him with all the strength of her nature, and she will not get over it in a day. She will require nursing, and perhaps a change of scene. And I cannot say that even those things will cure her."

Knowing nothing of what had happened, except that her father and Mr. Adams had quarrelled and that Garston and Gerald had been engaged in a personal altercation with the latter, Edith Staples came to call on Alma the next morning, as she would have done on any other day. She could not see that the difficulties of their parents ought to cause any estrangement between herself and her friend, and supposed that Mr. Adams had had no interest in the sale of the Garston property except to protect the brook, which matter she was sure her father would arrange to his satisfaction. She felt certain that Gerald's love was hers alone and that Alma not only knew it but approved of it. So she came up the walk as brightly as ever, and saluted Mrs. Adams with a kiss, as she had done every time she had met her, since she could remember.

"We came home yesterday," she said, "and I was

too tired to run down last night. Where is Alma ? It seems an age since I saw her."

"She is in her room," was the quiet reply, "and I think asleep. She is not well. I was up with her most of the night."

Edith wore a look of the deepest regret.

"Why, I had not heard of it," she exclaimed. "I hope it is nothing serious."

"Nothing but what time will cure," was the calm answer. Mrs. Adams wondered if all of this apparent surprise could be real. "She will have to be still for some days, and see no company, however."

"That is too bad. I want to see her so much ! Tell her I called, won't you, and let me know the very earliest minute I can go to her room. I promise to be very thoughtful and not excite her."

An hour later a messenger arrived from the Staples household with a beautiful bouquet of flowers, culled on their grounds and tastefully arranged by Edith's own hands. Alma's quick ear caught the purport of the words which the servant spoke at the door, and a tide of painful thoughts swept over her. Toward evening she surprised her mother by asking what she had done with the flowers that Edith had sent to her, and on being told that she had feared the gift would annoy her, answered gently :

"How could you think that ? Please have them sent up to me. Let me not lose Edie with the rest. It is not her fault, poor girl !"

This was taken as an encouraging sign. The flowers were placed where Alma could reach them easily and many times each hour she inhaled their fragrance. The next morning another bouquet was sent to take their place, and each day after that

another, and with each was a tiny card with some words of endearment and the sender's name. But for more than a week Alma did not leave her chamber.

On the fifth day Mary Carson, chief among the domestics of the Adamses, came tiptoeing into the sick room, and slipped a note under the sheets of the bed with a very mysterious air.

"I hope I haven't done wrong to bring it, miss," she said, "without telling your mother, but the young man particularly begged it of me, and said it was most important that I should put it into your own hands."

Alma glanced at the writing, though she knew instinctively that but one "young man" could have sent her a note with such a request.

"You did quite right, Mary," she answered all of a tremble. "When you go down tell mamma that I am quite comfortable and shall need nothing at present."

"Yes, miss." The maid tripped away, much relieved. "I hope there's some way for them to make it up," she said to herself, for she adored her young mistress and divined the cause of her illness.

When she was gone, Alma broke the seal of the letter, and read what follows :

**"MY POOR CHILD :—**They tell me that you are ill and I feel that I am in some way the unhappy cause of your trouble, though Heaven knows I would suffer anything rather than that the slightest harm should happen to you. I do not know what they have told you, and that makes it hard for me to defend myself.

But if I had an hour by your side I am sure I could convince you that I am not altogether to blame.

"When I sprang upon your father I was not responsible for what I did. I came up just in time to see my own father's face covered with blood from the gash in his forehead and I acted without reflection. I hear that he said something to him about Edith and me, which enraged him, and that this caused the blow. Whatever he said was caused by his cumulating anger and ought not to have been taken seriously. For my own part, I am very sorry that anything of the kind occurred. But it is too late to talk about that now.

"What I want most to tell you, my angel girl, is this: I love you more at this moment than I ever did. I want you to know that I have but one hope in life, and that is your promise that I shall one day call you my own. This you have vowed to me and I shall hold you to your word.

"These miserable quarrels over money matters must not keep us apart, my love. I feel strong to wait, now. Only send me word, I beg, that you still care for me.

"Yours while life remains,

"GERALD."

Girl nature is the same the world over. Faith in the one they love may be shaken until it seems as if not a shred could remain, and then, at the touch of the enchanter's wand, it is rehabilitated in all its fullness, in all its strength. Alma had been trying to accustom herself to the thought that everything was over between her and her lover. She had grown faint and dizzy in contemplating a future in which



he had no part. She had said to herself that she must be brave, and bear up, and remember her pride, as her father had told her. But now, as she read the letter, she forgot it all. She remembered only the dear eyes that had looked into hers, the arms that had encircled her, the lips that had been pressed to her lips. She read, she comprehended, she believed!

A burst of tears was the first effect of the news. Her overcharged nerves gave way before the unexpected change in the state of affairs. Then there succeeded to this an extreme calm, a peacefulness the like of which she could not recall in her experience. She wiped the tears from her eyes, bathed her face with a lotion that lay near her, and rang the bell for Mary.

"Brush my hair, if you please," she said, as the girl made her appearance. "I think I can sit up. I am much better."

The maid, who had been under a shade of doubt as to the possible effect of the smuggled note, showed her gratification.

"You must have had new medicine to make you so much stronger, Miss Alma," she said.

"Yes." Alma's face grew lighter as she spoke. "I have had new medicine, Mary, and I owe it all to you. Believe me, I shall not soon forget it."

When Mrs. Adams came up, she was gratified to see the marked improvement in the appearance of her daughter, and after a short talk she was persuaded to go for a ride, an exercise she had not taken since Alma became ill. The pliant Mary then brought a tablet and other writing materials, and Alma was left alone while she composed an answer to Gerald's epistle. It was written in the warmest



tone, and was much longer than the one she had received.

"I do not see how I could have doubted you, even under such provocation," was the burden of it. "Whatever happens, I shall never do so again. You may trust Mary to bring me your letters, as she is to be relied upon implicitly. Leave them as you used under the stone on the wall, and look for my answers in the same spot."

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## CHAPTER XX.

### "CONSIDERING HIS TEMPTATIONS."

The arrangements between Colonel Staples and John Garston did not wait for any decision of Gerald's. The morning after the sale the farmer met the Colonel by appointment at the office of a village lawyer and they were not long in coming to an understanding. The Colonel paid the amount due the Iowa Investment Company and advanced enough beside to clear every debt owed on the personal property. He confessed that the second mortgage was his own, so that that required no other attention. When all was disposed of he agreed to have a deed of the premises conveyed to Garston under a mortgage of sixty-five hundred dollars, which would put John in possession of quite a little sum of ready cash with which to tide over the winter and send Gerald back to Chicago to the office of Thurston & Thurston. The generous nature of these proposals made quib-

bling impossible, and the papers were made out on the spot, signed, sealed and sent to the county clerk's office to be recorded.

"I offered last night to advance Gerald money enough to take him through," said the Colonel, "but he had a touch of pride that stood in the way. It will be all right, now, coming directly from you. I would not have him give up his career for anything."

"I thank you," was the answer, as Mr. Garston stood in front of the office mirror to arrange the bandage on his head. "I hope I shall be able to make it right to you some day. I am not one of those who forget a kindness—nor an injury either," he added, significantly.

"Oh, let that drop," said Colonel Staples, pleasantly. "Adams and you have fought long enough. It was an ugly blow that he gave you yesterday, but he couldn't have thought of the ring. I'll wager he was sorry enough for it the next minute."

Garston put on his hat and left the glass.

"It's not the first blow he's given me, nor the worst one," he muttered.

"Well, let it pass. You've got your farm again, and if you do well you can clear it in a few years. Stick to wheat-raising, John, and let old sores rest. And, by the way, I'd fix that brook up if I were you. The water will spoil twenty acres or so of good land. I meant to have spoken to you about it before the papers were signed."

"Did you?" The tone was almost impertinent, considering what had passed. "I wouldn't have taken it under such conditions—no, not if it had been my

only chance. Fix up the brook ! *For him !* I should say not !”

The Colonel did not think it wise to press the matter, for he thought he could get this concession later.

“You’ll send Gerald back to his law books, though ?” he said, interrogatively.

“Yes, if he wants to go. But I wish that Adams girl wasn’t going to be so near him. I don’t like the idea of their being off where they can see each other. He’s promised to break off all connection with her, but young folks are uncertain.”

The Colonel was a trifle flustered.

“You don’t think he cares anything for her—anything special ?” said he.

“No, not in one sense. But they’ve been with each other since they were children, and she is strong-minded. Gerald is a good boy, but he is influenced easier than I wish he was. I’ll be plain with you, Colonel. If I had as much money as you have—if I was in good circumstances, I mean—I should propose to him to get married at once, instead of waiting three or four years. He hasn’t anything, nor I either, but it would have settled things, if it could have been done.”

Colonel Staples reddened as he understood the insinuation, but he rallied immediately.

“I’ve only one thing in the world to live for besides my wife,” he said, “and that is Edith. If I’ve tried to put away a few dollars it’s been in the hope that they would help her to ease and comfort when I could no longer provide for her. Her mind is all set on Gerald, I have seen that for a long time, and approving, as I have, of the young man, I’ve

been glad of it. I can't hope to keep my daughter always, and I don't know any one I'd rather her choice would have fallen upon. You've been plain with me, and I'll be the same with you. If they're of a mind to marry this year, I'll give them every help that I can. Then they can go back to Chicago with nothing to worry either of us. Still, I must say that I haven't any real fear of Alma. Why, he's been attached to Edith as long as he's known her."

On the third day after this, one of those days when Alma was ill in bed, and before she had received Gerald's passionate letter, Colonel Staples met Adams as he was driving out on a road near the village, and pulled up his horse to speak with him. It was impossible to help seeing that the mill-owner wore an air of reserve and did not seem over cordial in his demeanor but he could not let that keep him from saying what he wanted.

"I've asked John to fix up the bank of that brook again," said the Colonel, "and I think he'll come around to it in time, though he's a little cantankerous now."

"You didn't take pains to put it in your paper, when you sold him back the land, it seems," said Adams, sarcastically.

"No, I forgot it till it was too late. But I spoke to him afterward, and I'll go at him again. He's only spoiling a lot of good land, and he ought, as I told him, to let by-gones be by-gones after this."

Mr. Adams poked a fly from the rump of his horse with his whip.

"Don't put yourself out," said he, with exasperating slowness. "I've just bought the farm above me

belonging to Mr. Estes. I shall cut a channel ten rods long or so and run the brook-water around. There won't be any to bother him nor you in a fortnight more. I could have got along with the steam alone, and I shall mainly now, but the water would be handy in case of a break-down. The quart a bushel extra which I charge makes it about even."

There was a smoothness in his manner of delivery that belied the sarcasm of his words, and the Colonel did not know just how to reply.

"I hope you don't feel anything against me, Alvah, because I bid on the farm," he said, presently. "It was a public sale I haven't made anything out of it. I only wanted to help John, as an old friend."

Adams lifted his eyes and surveyed the speaker.

"You'll get what you bargained for, of course," he answered. "John wouldn't go back on his word after you've helped him out of the hole?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you? I thought maybe you did! Why, you're welcome to the boy! I've forbidden Alma to ever see him again, so we'll not stand in your way. Your money has bought him. He's yours. I wouldn't give my girl to him if he came on his knees and begged it! When I get a son-in-law, Colonel, I shan't take him from under the hammer of an auctioneer!

With this he hit the horse with the whip and drove away. Staples was too angry for a few moments to follow him, or there might have been another assault to record. When he could command himself he only said, "It's hit him harder than I supposed," and went home to talk it over with Edith. First, however, he consulted her mother, and that

wise woman, knowing her daughter much better than he did, advised procrastination. She said Edith was so high-minded that she would resent anything that looked like showing distrust or fear of her lover, and that the present was no time to push anything.

"If Mr. Adams is as angry as you think," she said, "it is probable that he will refuse to let Alma go back to school with Edith. That would simplify things. It is terrible to think that they must suffer from this business, when they have been like sisters so long. Don't cut their friendship any shorter than is necessary, and, if you can, let some one besides you take the first step."

So Edith, in blissful ignorance of the extent of the storm that was raging, plucked her bouquet each morning for Alma, who was delighted with its fragrance as well as with the kindness of the heart that sent it to her. On the seventh day, hearing that Alma was out of bed, she brought the flowers in person. To her great joy she was permitted to see her friend in her room, where she sat arrayed in white, and looking, as young and pretty invalids who have hopeful minds always do, very charming indeed.

"Alma, my darling!"

"Dear, dear Edie!"

How Edith had worried about her; how she had missed her society, without which Jefferson did not seem at all like itself; how happy she had been to learn each day that Alma was better, and how glad she was that she was now evidently on the road to complete recovery was told with all the earnestness that characterizes such protestations, when the one who gives them is nearing twenty years of age. Alma



responded in terms hardly less warm, and then both launched into the liveliest conversation, in which everything in Jefferson and vicinity bore a conspicuous part, except the one person who had until that day formed the main object of all their discussions. Neither mentioned nor in any way alluded to the name of Gerald Garston, which was certainly rather strange.

An hour like this, and then Edith departed, saying that she feared to stay longer lest she should tax the wasted energies of her friend, and that she should expect her at her house as soon as she could ride out.

Hope and Love are two wonderful physicians. It was but a few days after this that the invalid told her mother she wanted to go down into the grove and rest by herself in the summer-house. She would need only Mary Carson to keep her company there, and she did not wish, on any account, to be disturbed, as she felt the need of absolute quiet. Mrs Adams consented immediately to the plan, and Mary joyfully prepared to accompany her.

"If I should be out late, don't mind, mamma," said Alma, as she was starting. "I will send Mary up for a lunch if I get hungry. I feel that the air of the woods is what I want. The air of the woods—and perfect isolation."

Alma wondered how she could look her mother in the face and talk to her like this. In all her life she had never till this day deceived her in anything. She must be a very bad girl, she reflected, when such a falsehood gave her no compunctions. But the letter from Gerald that Mary had found under the

stone that morning had begged her to arrange some place where he could see her—some spot where neither of the objecting parents could trace them. She could think of none but the summer-house, and she felt that, with Mary to accompany her, there would be no great impropriety in meeting him within its walls. Besides, there would be a poetic reparation for the doubt in him that she had expressed when he asked her the other time to meet him there. His letters received of late had been so tender, so passionately idyllic, that she would have felt little uneasiness even had Mary not been available. And with that discreet young person upon the premises—she need not be too near, either—what more could Mrs. Grundy ask?

Mary's intentions in the matter were of the most honorable kind, though her part may seem open to criticism. She adored her young mistress, and had shared in common with others of the household the belief that she and Gerald "were just made for each other." When Alma was prostrated by the news that her father brought, the servants knew what was the trouble almost as soon as she, and all called it "a shame," and said it was a dreadful pity that so nice a couple should be torn apart because their elders were silly enough to indulge in a quarrel over a piece of land or a mill-brook. Mary was of a romantic mood. She had read many tales in which the fair heroine experienced the severest tribulations before she became the wife of the hero, and had there learned that no method, however uncommon, is deemed improper that has for its object the uniting of young and faithful hearts. Gerald had offered to pay her for carrying his messages, but she would

take nothing. She only desired to serve in what she fully believed to be a righteous cause.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Alma and Mary reached the summer-house, and it was but a few minutes later that Gerald opened the unlocked gate of the enclosure, as had been arranged in accordance with Alma's letter. Mary had discreetly retired to another part of the grounds, and Alma came alone to meet him. If either had had doubts of the other at any time, all was dispelled by the first glance. His arms were opened, and like a dove to its nest she flew into their embrace.

"My darling! my poor little pet!" he exclaimed. "How tired and pale they have made you with their senseless stories! Come into the house and let me tell you over and over again that nothing can ever separate us—that the more they try to wean me from you the stronger is my love!"

They went in together. Too happy at first to answer him in words, she lay contentedly against his breast, that haven to which she had so long wanted to fly.

"And to think that you have met me here, of your own accord!" he cried. "Could anything else in the world have given me equal delight?"

"I brought Mary," she whispered.

"For the sake of appearances only. You would not have been afraid of me alone?"

She shook her head and allowed him to taste the honey on her lips without a pretence of diffidence.

"How long can you remain?" he asked.

"As long as you wish."

"No!"

"Until eight or nine, if you desire. But you will tire of my company before that hour."

"Shall I?"

He looked and acted as if that was a contingency not likely to arise. When they could command themselves a little better they exchanged mutual confidences in relation to the state of affairs at home. She told him that her father had become very bitter against him, thinking it was all his fault that Mr. Garston had insulted him at the auction, and for the first time in his life had refused to listen to a word of defence from her. She frankly related what he had said about Colonel Staples buying a son-in-law at public vendue, for Mr. Adams had not scrupled to tell her the conversation he had had with that gentleman. Gerald reddened, and replied that his father had said he would never own him as a son if he spoke to her again. He was obliged, he said, to creep away like a thief under false pretences, in order to be there now.

"But all this has only made my love the stronger," he added, seeing the thick cloud that overspread her face. "If anything had been needed to cement my heart to yours—and nothing was—this action on his part would have done it."

"There is so much said about Edie," she commented. "Can it be that it has no foundation whatever in any act of yours?"

It was a direct question and he knew it must have a direct answer.

"You know my relations with her," he said. "They have been those of a friend merely. I know she likes me, and perhaps, if you were not in existence, something might have come about between

us, in time. The Colonel is altogether too officious in arranging things for me. I am old enough to make my own choice in a matter of such importance. I do not like to say anything against him, after he has done my father such a service, but he has made me feel contemptible. You see how it is, Alma. I have to go to his house, and I have to see Edith, for she is always there, and that makes people talk. And then I have to see you in this surreptitious way, because of those confounded quarrels !”

Alma looked up at him searchingly, for she still lay in his arms.

“Do you think she loves you, Gerald ? Or rather, *does* she ? For if she does, you know it very well.”

He hesitated for some seconds.

“She *likes* me, at least,” he said, at last. “I don’t want to appear egotistical. She likes me, and she would be glad to please her father. But what does it matter, Alma ?”

The girl was gazing thoughtfully on the floor.

“Matter ? It matters a great deal. If she loves you she will have to suffer. I know what it is to think you are going to belong to another. I hope she does not love you enough to go through what I did a week ago.”

He embraced her more tenderly yet, and reminded her gently that all her fears might have been saved by the secret marriage which he had begged her to make.

“Yes, that would have disposed of one set of fears,” she answered, “and perhaps given me another and a harder set to bear, in its place. I want to walk up to the altar with you, Gerald, before everybody. If my parents continue as obdurate as

they now are, I may have to choose between them and you, but I want to do it openly and not like one who seeks the darkness to accomplish that for which he fears the daylight. We will meet here till we can do better, but let us hope that something will soon interfere in our behalf."

He reminded her that it would be but a short time now before he should have to return to his law office and she to her seminary, in Chicago.

"That is the hardest thing I have to tell you," she said, with an effort. "I am not to go back there. They are thinking of another school nearer here, but at any rate I cannot return to the old one. They do not want me to be near you—nor near Edith, either," she added, lowering her voice. "I never knew them so set in anything before. Mamma does not say much but I can see that she agrees with him."

Gerald was quite upset by this piece of information.

"I hardly care whether I go or not, then," he answered, with a crestfallen look. "I have borne the trouble at the house because I thought that in a few weeks you and I would be where we could see each other with no difficulties in the way. If this keeps on, Alma, I shall give up my studies. They will drive me to it."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, not displeased, nevertheless, to receive this evidence of the regret that he felt at her information. "You must persevere in your profession, whatever happens. I should hate to think that I had done anything to retard your success in life. Edith will be there," she added, with a trace of mischievous meaning, "so you will not be wholly lonesome."



"Don't, Alma. That hurts me," he protested.

"It should not," she replied, gently. "She and I are the dearest friends. I know I could trust her with you. I know I could trust you anywhere. Only, don't—be very careful, Gerald—don't do anything to make her think you care for her. It—it would be—*cruel*."

He said "Hush !" in a whisper, and then carried her to a sofa near by and placed her upon it. She was a good weight for him to bear, but what lover ever realized the meaning of *avoirdupois* when his beloved one was the object.

"You are the sick one to-day ; the last time it was I," he said, laughing. "Now it is my turn to play the nurse."

"All the medicine I need is to have you by me," she murmured.

"It was all I needed, too, if I had been so candid as to own it," he smiled.

They talked about the school affair, and could not reconcile themselves to it, but it was agreed that wherever she was sent he would find his way thither as often as circumstances would permit, and that each would write daily. For the present they were to meet every other day in the summer-house at the same hour.

Mary brought a lunch at seven and they tasted it together, but neither was hungry for material food. Alma grew more and more charming as she regained her spirits, and they built a splendid future out of the very limited materials at hand in the course of the evening. Not once did the fair girl refuse or even question his right to all the kisses he wanted,

which were numerous. And when he reflected afterward Gerald thought he had behaved very well indeed, considering his temptations.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### CLIFF NELSON'S PROTEST.

Alvah Adams had never tried to influence his daughter in anything until there came up this matter of Gerald. She had been as free to follow her inclination in everything as though she were of full age, and he had always congratulated himself that there was nothing in which they seemed likely to differ. In this case, however, he had determined to use all of his efforts to put a stop to the intimacy of the young couple, believing that their further friendship could only result in subsequent pain and mortification to Alma. What might have happened had the girl set herself in opposition to his wishes, in an open way, it is difficult to say. He would have found it hard to use severe measures, and she might have been the victor. But as time passed on and she appeared to recover rapidly from the shock which he had been compelled to give her, Mr. Adams congratulated himself that he had pursued the right course, and that the love of the young man had not been so deeply grounded in his child's heart as he had feared.

In the course of a fortnight she went about her duties with very nearly the appearance of the former

time. She wore a subdued air that was new to her, but there was nothing to show that she suffered from grief. It was clear to her father, and to her mother as well, that the ill effects were passing rapidly away.

Mrs. Adams had long been in delicate health, and it happened at this season that she was taken with a sudden failing, which alarmed her husband seriously. The physician who attended her recommended a trip to the seashore, and Adams set about arranging to carry out his recommendations. Alma's school term would have begun soon, but the girl settled that matter by saying that she had had enough of study for the present. She would much rather, she said, remain and attend to the household affairs, which would enable her mother to prolong her visit East as much as she wished. Her parents came to the conclusion that it would be best to allow her to make her choice. She had already a fair education, and if she was content to remain at home, it was undoubtedly better that she should do so.

Gerald had been giving some uneasiness to his father of late by the condition of his health. He had become paler than usual, and his appetite was variable. He appeared to care for nothing, but would lie for hours at a time in a hammock, with his eyes fixed on vacancy, sometimes having to be called several times before he heard the person who accosted him. Garston ascribed this state of affairs to his son's fondness for Alma, but assured himself that it would soon pass off, and that he would be all the better when the reaction came. He heard from the Colonel that Gerald made his appearance regularly at his residence and often remained to supper, spend-

ing the evening in the sole company of Edith. The Colonel had also noticed that Gerald did not seem in his usual health, but ascribed it to physical causes.

"It is nothing lasting," he said. "A wedding journey would cure him. Young men are often struck that way."

"I wish he would take the wedding journey," replied John, with a clouded brow. "I have talked with him, and he says he cannot think of marrying until he can support his wife and himself. He is proud and stubborn, too, in his quiet way. The only method is to let him alone till he comes to his senses."

"It is nearly the time he has set to return to Chicago, is it not?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, but the firm he is reading with are willing to give him all the vacation he needs. I don't want him to hurry. When does Edith go?"

"She concluded not to go at all," was the reply. "She says it would be lonesome there without Alma, and I have let her do as she pleased. She'll keep on with her music at home and have a French teacher come to the house."

Cliff Nelson came to Jefferson for a short visit and was more shocked at the condition in which he found Gerald than any of the rest, not having seen him since they parted in the early summer, when the bloom of health and the flush of happiness was on his cheek.

"Look here, old boy," was his first greeting, "you are looking like the devil!"

"I'm not quite as well as I have been," Gerald admitted, "but it will be all right in a little time."

"All right!" echoed Cliff. "All wrong, you mean? Why, there'll be a funeral at your house in another month if you don't mend. What is it? Something about our two friends, eh? I suspected as much. Tell me. Have you found which of them it is?"

Gerald looked at the handsome face of his companion and groaned.

"There is no change, Cliff," he answered. "They make me the happiest and the most miserable fellow in the world, as they used. It has steadily grown worse to bear, and I have had no one to confide in. It does me good to see you, for you at least understand my trouble."

Little by little Nelson got out of him the situation of affairs, as they drove to Mr. Garston's house, and when they were comfortably seated on the veranda they continued the conversation for a long time.

"The fathers of both of them became unbearable," said Gerald. "They could not conceal their absolute certainty that I was in each case destined for the position of their son-in-law. They came with offers of financial assistance, both to myself and father, till it seemed as if I could stand it no longer. I had rather have become a tramp and begged my dinners on the road than have endured it another month. Finally Staples came to the auction, as I have told you, and bought the place, saving us from being turned into the street; and that gave him, as he considered, a first mortgage, not only on the farm, but on me. Adams thereupon got angry and ceased to bow when we met, so I was relieved of that nuisance, at least, but the assurance of the other one has been doubled to make up for it. Between them they were killing me. Now the pressure of the one

remaining is about as great as their combined weight was before."

Nelson heard this with gravity.

"I did not know that your father was in any trouble of this sort," he said. "If I had I should have offered to aid you myself. I could have done it just as well as not."

"That would, if possible, have been worse than the present muddle," said Gerald. "Turn which way I could there was nothing but obligation to some one, or what is popularly called ruin. I deliberately chose the latter, as far as I was concerned. I never asked the Colonel to come over and buy the place, nor did any one else. He heard of the auction and drove there of his own notion."

"It was very noble of him, I think," mused Clifford, soberly. "Though, considering you in the light of a future son-in-law, it was a perfectly natural thing."

"But he has no business to consider me as anything of the kind!" Gerald broke out, hotly.

Nelson caught eagerly at the straw of comfort.

"Then you no longer consider yourself a probable candidate for the hand of the fair Miss Edith?"

Gerald drew a breath of despair.

"I don't know. If they would all let me alone for twenty-four hours I might tell what I intend and what I don't."

"It is a simple question, after all," said Nelson, gravely. "Do you love her?"

"No doubt of it."

"Then that releases Alma," replied the other, with a strange look.

"Does it? I don't see it that way. Alma likes me.



I like her. It is not so easy as you think to part us."

Nelson rose and began to pace the room.

"See here, Gerald," he said, presently. "I think a great deal of you, but this thing is getting where there must be something done to bring you to reason. After what you have told me it is clear that you are going to marry Miss Staples. All the logic of events points in that direction. It forms a solution of all your troubles. That being the case it is nothing less than wicked for you to lead Miss Adams to think otherwise. If she cares for you it is all the more reason why she should know the truth as early as possible."

"Know *what* truth?" exclaimed Gerald. "That I can hardly live out of her sight? That is the only truth in connection with her that I am fully persuaded of. Oh, Cliff, I thought you would do something to aid me, and you only make it worse and worse!"

His companion grew dark about the eyes. He was a good-natured fellow, but he was on the point of an explosion at that moment.

"What is the matter with me, Cliff?" cried Gerald, wildly, rising and pressing his hands to his temples. "Here are these two girls, either of them fit consort for an angel. Both have a fondness for me which is as unaccountable as it is undeniable. And what does such love—such undeserved affection—do to me? Beautiful, pure and good as they are, they have already made me a fool, and they will yet make me a villain!"

The anger that had been rising in Nelson's brain turned to sympathy as he saw the earnestness of his friend.

"You are insane!" he answered. "No man in his senses would talk like this."

"I know it," said Gerald. "I *am* insane—in one way—and yet no body of physicians would order me placed in confinement. I am bad enough, and yet I have been trying for the past month to give up one of these girls—trying as man never tried before. I have met her three or four times a week, against the wishes of her father and the commands of mine—met her surreptitiously, passed hours with her—and every moment the thought has been uppermost 'Can I give her up?' The more I have put that question to myself the less able have I been to answer it. Then I have gone to see the other one, whom I can meet with the full approval of all our friends, and have asked myself the same thing concerning her, with the same result."

"You—you have met Miss Adams—alone?" stammered Nelson, with an aspect of sternness.

"Not exactly. A trusted maid of hers has always been within call."

"Of all the uncertain things which girls trust with their secrets," said Clifford, earnestly, "a maid is the worst. To-day she may be the soul of devotion—to-morrow something happens to make her reveal all that she knows and insinuate more. Gerald, you are my friend, but this must stop. I put it plainly. It must stop."

It is not pleasant to be dictated to by a self-constituted oracle, and Gerald felt his pride aroused.

"You are very plain, I must say," he replied, coldly.

"I am," said Nelson. "I will be plainer yet that there be no possibility of a misunderstanding I

esteem Miss Adams too highly to permit you to go on injuring her as you are doing."

Gerald listened with increasing astonishment.

"Injure her ! Injure Alma !" he repeated.

"Yes. Every time you meet her unknown to her parents, with only her maid to protect her good name, you injure her. And this is not the way to break with her, as you profess to think. The only way to do that is to write her a frank, honest letter, saying that your engagement to another makes it proper that you should cease attentions which might be misconstrued. This is the advice I give you. Follow it or not, as you will. Now, another thing. I cannot longer stay here as your guest. I shall go at once to the village hotel and remain there while I am in Jefferson."

Gerald started up and caught his friend by the sleeve.

"Come, Cliff, that is going too far," he exclaimed. "I have done nothing against *you*. You act as though we had had a quarrel. You talk about my being insane—I think it is you who are best open to that charge."

"No," said Nelson. "I have no quarrel with you, but there is danger of one, and if it comes it is better that I am not under your roof when the blow falls. You are playing double with these girls. I have no right to sit an idle spectator of your amusement. I shall go to the hotel. We have not fallen out and if we ever do it will be from no fault of mine. But one thing is certain, there must be a change in your conduct, and that right speedily. Gerald," he continued, assuming the tone of a pleading friend, "it is for your own sake, as well as

mine, as well as theirs, that I say this. You are old enough to understand that Results flow from Causes."

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### LIKE A MAN IN LIQUOR.

Gerald did not try longer to dissuade his friend from the step he had resolved upon. In the first place he felt that it would be useless, and in the second he was not sure that it would not be better for him that such a jealous spy upon his every movement was further away. So Nelson went to the hotel and Gerald thought for a long time of what he had said to him. Could he give Alma up? He did not share his friend's idea about the letter he ought to write. That seemed brutal, considering all that had passed. Neither had he any fear of the faithfulness of Mary Carson. There had been tattling servants in the history of love, but she was not of that mould. The summer-house was secluded. No one walked in the wood at night who would be likely to see him enter or leave it. As for Alma, it was her father's property, and she had a right to go and come when she pleased, without question. He did not mean to do her reputation harm, certainly not. Had he not told her that she was the only woman in the world for whom he cared?

And yet, he had said no less to Edith!

**What a tangled web he had been weaving, and**

how hopeless seemed the task of unwinding its meshes from the limbs which it enfolded !

The more he thought of it, however, the surer he became that he ought to make a brave effort to give Alma up. And as a preliminary to that end he wrote a note and left it under the flat stone, asking her to meet him that evening, instead of the next, as had been arranged.

Alma received the note with joy, when Mary brought it to her. Her parents had that day departed for the East, and she had been afflicted with lonesomeness ever since the train had steamed out of the depot with them on board. She met Gerald at the hour appointed, with more than her usual tenderness, and as he touched her ripe lips he knew that all the courage with which he had thought himself endowed had taken to itself wings and flown away.

She talked to him first of the departure of her parents, who were not expected to come back for a month or more. Then she expressed the hope that he would not feel obliged to go to Chicago until near the time they would return, as she could now meet him with the utmost freedom. Edith came to see her occasionally, but there was not the old cordiality, after all.

And Gerald told her that he was not going just yet, at any rate. He mentioned that Cliff Nelson had come to town and was staying at the hotel, saying that it was better to have him there than at his house, where he would know his every movement, and possibly become suspicious. He said that his father had also become quite a Cerberus, and that **he had pretended to retire to his room at eight, on**

account of indisposition. Without this deception he should find it hard to get these evenings to himself.

"You ought to see Cliff," he said. "He is handsomer than ever. You know he was always fond of you, Alma, and I don't think he has given up hope yet."

She blushed and replied that he must not talk nonsense.

"Mr. Nelson never said a word to me except the ordinary courtesies," she added. "I think you are too much inclined to draw on your imagination."

Gerald liked to see the roses come into her cheeks, which were still a little affected by the paleness that had come to her at the time of her illness.

"Oh," he said, "Cliff is a thorough gentleman. There isn't a mean streak in him. If you were my sister, there isn't a man on earth that I would so soon give you to. But, as it is, I don't see how I can oblige him."

This made her laugh, and the conversation took on a lighter tone. She told him, among other things, that they were entirely alone in the summer-house that evening. Mary had wanted very much to go to a friend's, where she should remain till eleven o'clock, and Alma had given her permission. After all, it was just the same. Nobody would know she was absent, and nobody would guess, at any rate that Gerald was there.

Oh, yes, it was quite the same.

They told each other this several times, but one of them knew different. From the moment that they heard that Mary had gone and that there was no one on the premises, but himself and Alma, there was a tornado in the heart of Gerald Garston. He



could not sit still. He walked about the rooms, looking at the pictures and furnishings. When he talked his utterance was not as distinct as usual.

"My head aches," he said, in answer to her anxious queries.

She made him lie down, and brought camphor, with which she bathed it. The ache did not disappear, however. He could not stay there, but got up and walked again. She accompanied him, growing paler as she saw his agitation. She was alarmed, but did not know what to say, and thus the strange actions went on for an hour or more, until she was nearly exhausted with her emotions.

"Alma, darling," he said, suddenly, stopping and facing her, "would it not have been better if you had married me when I asked you? Tell me, from your heart, do you not wish at this moment that I were your husband?"

"If—if—," she began. "If you insist upon it as necessary to your happiness, I will marry you to-morrow."

She thought this would extort a cry of pleasure from him, but it did not.

"*To-morrow!*" he exclaimed, in so loud a voice that she feared lest it should pass the walls of the building and the limits of the enclosure. "*To-morrow!* There is no to-morrow! There is nothing in this world but to-day! To-morrow is a million centuries off! How can you talk to me of *to-morrow!*"

The tears came into her eyes, in spite of all that she could do to repress them, but he saw them not. He was blind.

"Alma!"

She started to go nearer to him, but he moved backward as she approached.

"Are you afraid to remain here alone till Mary comes? I think I shall have to leave you."

The tears that had gathered fell in a shower.

He did not see them.

"No," she answered. "I am not afraid."

"Good-night, then."

He walked to the door like a man who has been drinking liquor, and opened it. Then he rolled out of the gate, and went through the wood, seeking not for travelled ways.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

"IT'S FOR EDITH!" HE MUSED.

There was something very noble in the position which young Nelson occupied. Ever since he had known Edith he had admired her, and now that admiration had grown into the deepest love. He had no sisters, and she was the only girl for whom he had ever felt a strong attachment. Toward Alma he had a feeling that he could not put into words, that made him assume a sort of guardianship over her when she seemed menaced by danger. But that was not *love*. Edith was the one who had his heart in thrall. Yet there had been little to give him hope that he would ever have the opportunity to tell her of his sentiments.

So long as there was anything between her and

Gerald, he was barred out by the commonest rules of honor. And more than that, he had observed her too closely not to know that, while Gerald was in the way, the suit of no other man on earth would have the least effect upon her.

There was no reason why he should not call upon her—indeed she would have thought it strange if he had not, knowing that he was in town—and he took an early opportunity of visiting the Staples mansion. She received him kindly, but he saw at a glance that there was trouble in her face. He guessed the truth—that Gerald was not as regular in his calls as she thought he should be. One of the first things brought out in their conversation was the fact that he was living at the hotel, which he ascribed to greater convenience. She asked him, with an effort, if he had seen Gerald, and he said that he had, once or twice, but not for long interviews.

“And you have called on Alma, of course?” she said.

“No. I mean to do so soon, however.”

“I know she will be glad to see you,” said Edith. “I have sometimes thought,” she added, archly, “that she had an especially warm side for you.”

He wondered how she could be so blind.

“You are surely mistaken,” he answered. Then he continued, unable to resist the inclination, “I suspect, on the contrary, that she has a decided preference for another?”

She regarded him vacantly.

“Another? No, there can be none. We are so intimate that if there were she would have told me.”

How thoroughly both of these girls believed in their hold on Gerald.

"It matters not," said Clifford, more soberly than he was wont to speak. "I have set my affections elsewhere."

The natural curiosity of the feminine mind overpowered Edith.

"Ah!" she said. "Is it a secret, or can you give me her name?"

"I cannot, now. There may be a time when I can," said he, with great deliberation. "But I assure you that it will be either her or no one."

"You imply that there is doubt of your happiness," said Edith, sweetly. "I hope sincerely that the difficulties, whatever they are, will be removed. You deserve one of the best girls in the world."

He took up her hand and kissed it with the reverence of a devotee.

"You would aid me, if you could?" he asked.

"You may be sure of that," she answered, warmly.

He was afraid he should say too much, and he soon after took his departure.

From Edith's house he went to that of Alma. It was not yet late, and he wanted to have a talk with her too. The servant who answered his ring told him that her young mistress had gone out to spend the evening, and she did not know at what hour she would return. Not liking to go to his hotel so early, Nelson took a long stroll up the road, ending by going into the woods and lying down under a tall tree, to dream alone. He had lain there perhaps an hour when he heard a quick step approaching

and saw Gerald walking at a strange and reckless gait through the underbrush.

So peculiar was his friend's action, that Nelson's first thought was that he saw a somnambulist. Gerald turned aside for the larger trees and bushes, but over the smaller ones he stalked like a wild animal, who had no idea of roads or clear spaces. Nelson started to his feet and called his name three times before he received any intimation that his words had reached the ears for which they were intended. Then Gerald stopped like one startled, looked around and replied, in a hoarse voice :

"Who's there?"

"It is I."

Nelson stepped out of his concealment and saw that the face of his friend was ghastly. His eyes were streaked with red, and his entire appearance was the reverse of natural.

"Where did you come from?" asked Gerald, suspiciously.

"I have been lying here under this tree for an hour or more."

Gerald's eyes cleared a little as he spoke next.

"You are a friend of mine, aren't you?"

"I hope I am."

"Have you a pistol?"

There was such a calm, cold-blooded tone in this inquiry that Nelson shuddered.

"I have not. What could I do with one?" he replied.

"You could do me a favor. You could place me against that tree and shoot me dead."

Clifford was thoroughly shocked.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Let me walk

home with you. You want to get to bed and rest. You need medicine."

The soothing voice had a certain effect, and Gerald suffered himself to be led in the direction indicated. But he had no notion of telling this man what ailed him.

"How came you out here?" he asked. "It is a good way from the hotel."

"I took the liberty of calling upon your affianced," replied Nelson, soberly. "We talked of nothing but you, however, so you need have no jealousy."

Gerald stared at him a moment before he comprehended.

"Do you mean Edith?"

"I said 'your affianced.' Whom else could I have meant? Have you several of them?"

A shiver passed over the form of the other man.

"I don't know whether I have one," he said. "There was never a formal engagement between Edith and me. If there were I should feel it my duty to ask a release; for to night, if never before, I know I cannot marry her."

Nelson felt greatly agitated by this statement. He knew not what to think.

"When you have rested, you will be able to talk more coherently," he said. "She fully understands that you and she are engaged. And let me tell you that you trifle with the heart of a superior girl when you play at fast and loose with Miss Staples."

Gerald admitted by a nod that he had no desire to controvert this statement.

"I am not insane, as you seem, perhaps not unreasonably, to think," he answered. "I may have been for a moment out of my mind, but now I am quite



sober and sensible. For three years I have been trying to ascertain which of these girls I most cared for. At last I have discovered. There is one of them without whom life would be a miserable blank to me. And Cliff, it is not Edith."

Nelson stopped stock-still in the road. He had anticipated he knew not what, but never this.

"You mean," he said, "that you love Miss Adams, after all?"

"Beyond a doubt. It is clear to me now as the sun at noon. As soon as I can I shall try to communicate to Edith the fact that there can be nothing more between us."

Clifford did not mean to introduce himself into the matter if he could help it, and he thought it his duty to say something more.

"It will be a blow to her," he said. "She is a girl—I might almost say woman—of strong affections. They are all centred on you. There has been nothing to prepare her for this."

"Don't, Cliff!" he exclaimed. "It is not an easy thing, and you have no right to make it harder. While, as I tell you, my eyes have been opened at last to where my love really lies, I have a regard for Edith which surpasses that which other men feel for their favorite sisters. I would do anything in the world to spare her pain. She is very, very dear to me. The knowledge that I must cause her suffering is terrible to me, but how can I escape? Would that our friendly relations could have gone on forever! But since custom compels me to discard the one when I take the other, it must be she who is left. Edith I like as well as ever—but Alma! There is

no language to express my adoration—my complete worship of that girl!"

Nelson heard him wonderingly.

"The Colonel will be much disappointed," mused he.

"By God," cried Gerald, "whatever they do, they shall not buy and sell me! There is enough of manliness left in me for that, at any rate! I shall have to give up everything for Alma, and I am willing to do it. My father will never forgive me if I marry the daughter of the man he considers his worst enemy, and no one can reason with him. Adams will make an awful row, perhaps disinherit his child, and refuse to speak to her again. Staples will feel hurt, Edith will call me a heartless wretch, when I have only tried to save her from the worst fate imaginable, and you—the last one left—will cast me over. Everything will have to go, and only Alma will be left me. *Only* Alma! I would rather live with her on a desert island than with any other girl in the midst of friends and plenty!"

Nelson felt that Gerald was fully in earnest, but it was all so strange.

"How did this knowledge come so suddenly?" he asked. "It was but yesterday that you could not come to any decision between them, and that you leaned, if at all, to the other side."

Gerald paused, and turned his face toward the moon, which shone upon and illumined it.

"It came to me as the Truth came to Saul on the road to Damascus! I have been with her to-night!"

"You left early," said Clifford, cynically. "Your *actions*, too, at the moment when I accosted you,

were not of the kind one ought to expect in a happy lover."

Geraïd had for the time forgotten the events which sent him roving wildly through the wood, and at the recollection of them his countenance grew sober.

"That—that was something else," he stammered.

They were near his father's gate now, and he walked slowly. As he had professed to have a headache and had retired early, he did not desire that his parent should see him re-enter the house, if by any chance he were yet awake.

"When you have had a night's rest, and tell me this again, I shall know how thoroughly to believe you," said Nelson, as he turned to leave. "There is something unsettled about your mind to-night which leaves me a little in doubt."

"Oh, you may believe it all now," responded Gerald. "I shall marry Alma. I must. I am not good enough for her—understand that, Cliff. It is a miracle that she loves me, but I believe she does, if ever woman loved man. As to Edith—that's the hard thing. I don't know how I shall manage that. It will give me sad hours as well as her." He waited, but could think of nothing more to say on that point. "I wanted to learn which of them it was, and until I did learn, what could I do but wait? Don't be hard on me in your thoughts, old boy. My road is a straight one now, and I should be a villain not to follow it."

Nelson was thinking of something else at that moment.

"Tell me before I leave you," said he, "why it

was that you asked me to place you against a tree and shoot you."

Gerald tried to laugh away the ugly incident.

"Perhaps I *was* a little crazy," he said. "I cannot tell you what caused my aberation, but it was nothing serious—nothing that is going to be so now. I am glad you did not take me at my word."

Gerald walked slowly up to his father's door. It was now half-past ten o'clock, and he was much surprised to see his parent sitting at that, to him, unheard of hour, on the veranda.

"So you did not go to bed?" said his father, in a tone in which no special meaning could be discerned.

"Yes, I did, but the room was close, and I went out to stroll. I think it has done me good."

"Whom where you talking with just now?"

"Cliff Nelson. I ran across him accidentally."

Garston looked at his son and thought how well he bore the scrutiny.

"I want to talk to you a few minutes, Gerald," he said. "Have you considered that matter of marrying before you go back to Chicago?"

The young man paled at the question, though he had been white enough before.

"I have," he answered, "and as I told you, I do not see the object of haste."

"It ought to be something to you that I wish it," said the father.

"It is. I have tried to agree with you, but I cannot. I entreat you not to press me further. You surely wish me to be happy, and this matter I must settle for myself."

Without the least discourtesy, but as if the con-

versation naturally ended at this point, Gerald bowed a polite good night and entered the house.

The next morning Garston met Colonel Staples, who told him that Gerald had not been to see Edith for three days and that she was in some anxiety in consequence, though she was doing her best to conceal it. The Colonel also said that business would compel him to take a trip to Europe within a short time, and that, as he should be absent some months, he would like to have this other matter settled before his departure.

Garston rubbed his hands craftly.

"You ought to take the young couple along," he said. "If it is managed right, you can do so. Edith is through with her school, and Gerald is not feeling well enough to resume his studies at present. Say nothing to anyone till I tell you the time is right. Then spring it upon them suddenly, and you will have them for fellow passengers. After that, all will go easily."

"That would be delightful," said the Colonel, with beaming countenance.

"Can you start at short notice?" asked John.

"At an hour's, for such a purpose."

"Trust me, then, and be quiet till I speak."

There was such an exhibition of low cunning in Garston's face that the Colonel, by nature a man of the highest honor, felt a sense of shame of having become his partner in so underhanded a business. But he had a daughter whose happiness depended on the arrangement he was trying to make, and for her sake he sank his sentiments.

"It's for Edith," he mused, as he went his way.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## NO SLEEP FOR ALMA.

No sleep came to Alma's eyes on that terrible night when her lover left her at the summer-house. She had been too frightened to try to stop him when he proposed going, and yet she felt a vague alarm at what might happen to him after he had gone. She knew he was of a peculiar disposition, and in his excited state many things were conceivable.

Mary Carson returned at the time agreed and found her young mistress with the traces of tears on her cheeks, though she had tried her best to remove them. The maid did not dare inquire the cause of the trouble, but in her own mind attributed it to nothing more serious than a lovers' quarrel, which she supposed inevitable in all cases of true love and without permanent effect. On the following morning, when Alma did not rise from her bed, Mary grew more uneasy, and began to wish she had had no part in an affair which seemed destined to bring more sorrow than happiness to the one she loved so well. But, at noon, she brought Alma a note found in the wall, and saw that this magic force had still power to work a miracle. Half an hour after receiving the letter, Alma was dressed and about the house, singing softly to herself, and apparently more joyous than ever.

The letter was written in Gerald's most tender and repentant strain. It plead for forgiveness,



deplored the condition into which he had allowed himself to drift on the previous evening, and declared that nothing of the kind should ever mar their future. He told her that he had never realized until now how dearly he loved her, and that his every effort hereafter should be to make himself worthy of the only woman for whom he could ever care.

To do Gerald justice, he meant every word of this—when he wrote it. He had passed a miserable night, and awoke with his conscience gnawing. He dreamed of nothing but seeing Alma again, and convincing her that he was a better man than his actions had led her to think. He was not without fear that she would take his conduct seriously, and the dread that she might refuse to meet him again without the sanction of her parents troubled him exceedingly.

"I can hardly endure the moments until you tell me I am forgiven," he wrote. "If you are at the summer-house this evening, I shall know that I am to live. If you are not, I shall take it as my death-blow, and in the morning I shall leave Jefferson, never to set foot in it again."

Alma told Mary that she should spend the evening at the summer-house, and the kind-hearted girl rejoiced to see in the eyes of her mistress the familiar smile of happiness which had momentarily disappeared. It was Mary's habit to take a book with her, as the hours which she spent in the dining-room at the cottage were dull and stupid, unless she had something in the way of entertainment. The young couple in the parlor, with their imaginable billing and cooing, only made the position of the quasi-chaperone all the more lonely, for Mary was a sus-

deftible girl, and had known what it was to have an adorer of her own. She usually read the book as long as she could keep awake, and then relapsed into slumber until the voice of her mistress was heard telling her that it was time for them to go home. On this occasion she took the novel she had brought and found herself absorbed in the woes of its heroine, while Alma watched and waited anxiously for the step of the one she loved.

Gerald, who was expected at eight o'clock, did not arrive till nearly an hour later. Alma grew impatient, fearing everything that her active brain could conceive of. When he came at last, she flew to him without a moment's delay.

"Oh, I feared something had happened to keep you away!" she cried, in a low voice. "What was the matter?"

"I could not escape the watchful eyes of my father," he answered, with a trace of bitterness. "I pretended illness again, and went to my room, but he sat up later than usual, and I could not pass the veranda. Is it not an outrage that I should be compelled to endure this sort of thing?"

"You must endure it a little longer," she said, nestling close to his breast. "I am a sharer with you in the deception, for I meet you against all the commands of my father. At first it made me feel very wicked, but I am becoming hardened. There will come a time when we shall look back on these meetings and be glad that we dared to have them."

They had entered so noiselessly that Mary Carson had not heard Gerald's step, and the future conversation was carried on in such low tones that it reached no other ears than their own.

"The first thing I want is your forgiveness—" he began, but she stopped him.

"Say nothing about it, Gerald. Your note quite sufficiently explains all."

"But I must have made you suffer horribly. If my own feelings were any criterion, you must have had an awful night. I do not know what was the matter with me. I was quite out of my head, and really knew nothing after I left you until I met Cliff Nelson, half a mile from here."

She started, alarmed at the statement.

"He did not suspect—"

"No, but he wondered what had happened to affect me so. Just to plague him I have pretended that I did not know which I loved best—you or Edie—but when we met last night I told him the truth. I said there was but one little girl in the world for me and that was you. I didn't mean to be quite so confidential, but I was afraid he would be calling on you and proposing, and I didn't like to take any risks."

It pleased her to hear him talk like this, for it showed that he rejoiced in the possession of her love, and was not willing that any other man should have an opportunity even to ask for it. Gerald was very dear to her that night, all the dearer for the little episode of the evening preceding.

"Mary is with you this time, of course?" he said, presently.

She assented, and indicated the dining-room as the present location of the person inquired for.

"You won't let her go again?"

"No."

She shook her head decidedly.

"She will not be likely to come in, though?"

"Not unless called."

Gerald laughed.

"I don't think you'll need to call her," he said. "She has great faith in us. I really believe she thinks it a sort of Christian duty to help us to these meetings."

Alma agreed with a smile.

"If she thought it wrong she would not do it, I am sure. She is the most devoted girl."

Gerald drew the figure which he had been encircling with his arm closer to his breast.

"We will have her with us—when—when we are married."

"Oh, to be sure."

He drank in the sweet breath for a moment. Then he found his brain growing unsteady again.

"When was it," he asked, "that you first thought you loved me?"

"I don't know. I can't remember. But since we have met here my love has grown to be a very different thing from what it was before."

He asked her to explain, but she could not.

"I feel now," she said, "as if I could not live were we to be parted."

"Why, that," he said, "is like the love of a wife to her husband."

"Yes. If we were already married, you could not be dearer than you are."

He drew a long breath.

"Oh, I wish we were! It is such a little thing—that ceremony—and yet it means so much! A few words from a clergyman, and we could tell Miss Mary there to give up her post of watcher. I am so tired of waiting for you!"

She placed an arm affectionately about his neck.

"Why, you have me already."

"No," he answered, with tightening lips, "I do *not* have you. We are here at a risk to our reputations. We come in and creep out like burglars. You told me yesterday that you would agree to a secret marriage, if I insisted upon it. Alma, I think I must insist."

She had hoped that he would forget her rash promise, for she dreaded above all things taking a step of that kind, which seemed cruel to her parents, who had always granted her every favor she had asked them.

"Let us talk it over sensibly," she said. "Of what use would it be?"

"It could stop idle tongues if it were discovered that we have met here," he replied, quickly. "Is that nothing to consider?"

"I could prove that Mary had always been with us," said the girl, with a blush.

There was a covert sneer in the smile with which he met this.

"She is your servant, and herself only a young woman. It would amount to nothing. Are you trying to avoid carrying out your own proposal? You told me frankly that you would do it if I insisted."

She knew that this was true; and yet she wanted to find some avenue of escape that should be, at the same time, satisfactory to him.

"Listen to me, Gerald," she said, after a pause. "My father and mother are to return in three or four weeks. I will make you this promise and keep it faithfully. When they arrive I will go to them

openly and tell them that I love you—that I have promised to be your wife, and that I want their blessing. I will pray them to grant it, begging it if necessary on my knees, and I think they will give their consent. If they do not—if they say it shall not be, no matter with what threats they couple the decision, I will marry you as soon after as you wish. But it must be before the world, Gerald. It must be before the world! It would kill me to have it said—that I—”

The tears had risen to her eyes. He soothed her gently and kissed away the briny drops. In spite of all she could not help sobbing on his shoulder, and he began to feel a good deal like a villain.

A coil of her rich, dark hair fell upon her neck. He begged her not to put it up again just then, and soon his fingers were slowly unbraiding it as he talked to her. The tresses which he unbound were of unusual luxuriance and he made a veil of them which hid both their faces, as his cheek lay against hers. She ceased to sob and they found contentment in silence.

Mary had forgotten to fill the lamp on the table and at this juncture it went out. There was light enough, however, from the windows, through which the moonlight shone, and they could see each other distinctly.

“The sky must be full of stars to-night,” said Alma, at last, after neither had spoken for a long time.

“I see but two,” he answered, gazing full into her eyes. “I see nothing, know nothing but you. I think the world has receded, and left us two alone.”





There are tragedies of the sea, tragedies of the land, tragedies of the air. A steamer goes down with a thousand souls on board. A railway train dashes from a bridge, and the spreading fire completes the deadly work. An æronaut with his party of pleasure seekers dares the dizzy height and from the ether all come tumbling. There are tragedies of the noiseless dagger, the quick report of the ready revolver, the pangs of the purposely administered poison. Cupidity and Revenge slay their multitudes, but Love uncontrolled wrecks more lives than they. Decked out in pleasing attire, coming velvet-shod, it works its havoc ere Suspicion thinks to wake the sentinel.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

“WHAT WAS THAT SOUND?”

It was bright daylight when Mary Carson started from her armchair in the dining-room, and realized how long she had slept. In another second she opened the doors that led to the parlor, and discovered Alma sleeping soundly upon the sofa there. The long hair of her mistress was unbound and floated about her like a cloud, while on her cheeks were the tell-tale traces of tears.

“O dear! O dear!” groaned Mary to herself. “Must they always end like this? Nothing but another quarrel could have made her cry.”

She stooped down and awoke Alma as gently as

she could. The girl gazed at her with a fixed expression when first she opened her eyes, as if she were uncertain whether what she saw was real or something in a dream.

"It is morning," said Mary, apologetically ; "I have been asleep. I did not hear Mr. Gerald when he came or went."

Alma roused herself slowly, sat up and allowed the maid to arrange her hair.

"What time did he come?" asked Mary, feeling the oppression of the silence. "It must have been very late."

A shiver ran over the frame of her mistress.

"He did not come at all," she replied, in a forced tone.

"Not come? After his note! And that is why you have been weeping! My poor girl! But you do wrong to weep. It could have been no fault of his, I am sure of that. He loves you, if ever a man loved. I shall be so glad when the time comes for you to be married, and all this unhappy business is over!"

Again the shiver ran over Alma's frame, but she repressed it as well as she could, and began to put on her hat.

"I can trust you, Mary, can I not?" she asked, studiously avoiding her eyes. "I have something important to tell you—a very great secret."

Mary caught one of her mistress' hands and kissed it warmly.

"I would die for you!" she exclaimed.

"I shall want—I shall need—your help," continued Alma, with a frigid reserve quite foreign to her usual manner of intercourse. "I—"

She staggered and would have fallen had not Mary extended her arms and caught her. But she immediately rallied and stood upright again.

"I am going—to be—married," she continued, slowly. "It is to be a secret affair, for my father—and—" she hesitated long—"my mother would object. But—when they know of it—they will—forgive me—and him. You understand. We are to be—married—quietly, and it is not to be known to any one but you and the—the person who performs the—ceremony."

Mary clasped her hands in supplication.

"Oh, Miss Alma, is it wise?" she cried. "It is not my place to advise you, but have you thought of everything?"

Alma choked down a rising in her throat at this evidence of devotion.

"It is to be," she said. "I will let you know when—to-morrow. He—Gerald—will bring a justice here—no, no! not here!" she exclaimed, suddenly, looking about the room. "Not *here*! That was a mistake. But we will meet him somewhere—and you will go as a witness. Do not ask me to explain. There is danger that they will try to part us if they know it, and—when this ceremony is performed—they can do nothing. He will be mine, then—mine forever!"

There was no surprise at the Adams mansion when Alma returned just at breakfast time and said that she and Mary had stayed all night at the summer house. The weather was unusually warm for the season and it was much cooler by the lake. Alma found letters from her parents that had just been brought from the post-office, and she read them with flutter-

ing heart. Had ever a girl such parents as she, and had ever one so basely deceived them? She thought of the sweet, gentle face of her mother, who was reported no better, and felt hardly fit to call her by that dear name. What would she say if she knew?

She had gone so far now that she could not recede. The sooner she had a right to the name of wife the better. To wait till her father returned was out of the question. She heartily wished she had accepted Gerald's proposal to have the secret marriage a week ago. Probably no one would ever learn of her indiscretion; but, whatever happened, she would have the companionship—the love, long as life lasted—of the man she adored.

She had no thought of blaming him. What girl ever blames her lover while he remains true? There might be a great deal of trouble in store for her—possibly the loss of parents, friends, the home where she had always lived—but there would always be Gerald! Twelve hours must elapse before she could meet him again! How could she wait so long?

As evening approached she grew more and more impatient. She was more anxious now than ever Gerald had been to have the ceremony of marriage take place, and he had promised to fix the day and hour when he came again. As soon as she had eaten a scanty supper she went to the summer-house with Mary, though she had no reason to expect her lover for two hours yet. She was exceedingly nervous, trembling in every joint, and starting at the least sound.

She declined Mary's offer to sit with her till he came, saying she would much rather be alone. When she heard his step she sprang to meet him and

clung about his neck as a drowning person clings to a spar.

"Gerald!"

"My wife!"

There was something in that tender word that made her relax her hold and cover her eyes with her hands.

"Don't call me that—yet!" she said. "I feel so wicked!"

He kissed her mouth, her neck, her hair, and when he had disengaged her hands he kissed them, too, and then the eyes he had uncovered.

"So you are not my wife?" he said, brightly. "Yes, before God, you are!"

"And when is the ceremony to be?" she asked, casting down her glance.

"The ceremony? Are you, then, in such a hurry for that form?"

She put her hands on each side of his head and drew his face close to hers with a spasmodic movement.

"Oh, Gerald, you will not delay it—*now*?"

He laughed good-humoredly, for her intensity pleased him.

"Not an instant longer than is necessary," he responded. "I have spent half the day trying to find a fellow who does such things—Justice Moseley, whose home is over in Linton. They told me he was at one place and another, and I kept up the chase until it got so late that I feared keeping you waiting. But I have left word that I shall see him to-morrow, and no doubt I can arrange to have him meet us here the next day."

She heard him with the deepest interest, and at the final words, shook her head.

"Not *here*, Gerald. I cannot have it *here*. Anywhere else you please, but not here."

He understood.

"I shall have to think of some other place, then," he said. "We cannot be seen in public together, for that would attract attention. I will ask Moseley what he has to suggest. He is all right—he'll keep it as still as the grave, and nobody'll be the wiser. Have you said anything to Mary?"

She told him that she had, and that the maid had agreed to be a witness. She told him also that she had fallen asleep on the sofa and had not been awakened till daybreak, at which he expressed regret.

"And I ran away at one o'clock!" he said, ruefully. "Ah, well! It can't last much longer!"

He seemed to be in great good humor and had an abandon that was new to him. Alma thought he was not as grave as he ought to be, but she did not tell him so. He was now all that she was sure of in the world, and she did not like to annoy him by too much criticism. It was midnight when he left, and she went to tell Mary that she had concluded to remain at the cottage again instead of going home.

"Gerald has been making arrangements for the marriage," she said. "He thinks it can be arranged to-morrow or the next day."

There was so much of exultation in her voice that Mary did not like to say anything to discourage her. A happy mood was better, she thought, than a tearful one. She wondered, at the same time, if there were any possible doubt of the full validity of a ju-



tice's marriage, and determined to take a good look at the papers when the ceremony should occur. Still, the more she thought of it, her fears seemed foolish. Gerald had loved Alma ever since he was a child. Why should he wish to deceive her? It was a fantastic conception, and Mary resolved to banish it from her mind, or at least not to mention it to her confiding young mistress.

The next evening, when he came, he told Alma that he had not seen the justice, but that on the succeeding day he should surely meet him. He seemed as happy as she at the prospect, and they tried to plan out their future. She had money enough of her own to support them for a year or two, if both their fathers remained obdurate, and after that Gerald would be earning something at his profession.

"When I am twenty-one there is nearly two thousand dollars beside for me," she said, "from a sum my grandfather left me. We shall want almost nothing till then. I think I could live on your smiles and ask no other food."

"And I on the honey of your lips," he exclaimed. "My wife!—no don't tell me not to say it! My wife, my darling wife!"

The tears that stood in her eyes now were happy ones.

"It is too wonderful to last!" she whispered, softly. "Life cannot be a succession of days like this!"

"It will furnish us many far brighter ones!" he answered.

At that moment both of them started, and each read the same thought in the eyes of the other.

*"What was that sound?"*

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## NURSING HIS REVENGE.

It was the fifth day since Gerald had been seen at the Staples mansion. Edith knew that he was in town, and his unaccountable absence gave her the deepest distress. She knew that he was given to odd ways, but there seemed no reason for his conduct in this instance. The colonel asked each evening, or each morning, if he happened to be from the house, "Has Gerald been here, yet?" and when the silent negative greeted him his face grew dark and he felt duplicated in his own mind all the suffering that his daughter experienced.

The colonel did not mean to say much to Edith, if he could help it, until something definite had been arranged. But she anticipated him one evening, and compelled him to enter on the dreaded subject sooner than he had intended.

"I want to talk with you, father," she said, coming to his side in his library, where he was trying to read a newspaper. "You know there is something wrong about Gerald. It troubles me and that makes it trouble you. Now—don't interrupt me, please, for a minute—I care a great deal for him, but he cannot treat me in this way much longer. He is at his father's. He comes and goes in the village. Everybody sees him. I have sufficient love to bear almost anything but neglect. It is five days since he has called. I shall wait two days more—that will give

him a week—and then I shall write, saying that I release him from all the promises he has made."

The father heard her with great distress.

"Wait a little longer, Edie," said he. "Gerald is not well. He is passing through a period that neither his father nor I can understand, but he loves you, and you must do nothing to prevent his return to a normal state. Let it go a few days longer, and he will come back to you, and very sorry, I am sure, for the neglect he has shown."

She did not seem in the least convinced.

"I cannot share your opinion, father. And there is another thing. I want to go with you to Europe. I could not stay here, where people are already gossiping. You, yourself, say that I am not looking well. A voyage would do me good. Dear father, if nothing comes to re-unite us, let me go with you."

The colonel hesitated, but finally said that if Edith would consent to do nothing until the time came for his departure—which would give Gerald what he was obliged to admit was ample time to change his course—he would take her. It was his hope that Garston would have his arrangements made by that time, and that Gerald would be one of the party. On the whole it was as well that Edith had spoken. It could give her something to take up her mind, and if everything did break between her and Gerald the foreign journey would certainly be best. He knew that the girl felt severely the blow that she had received.

A week passed, and nothing was seen of Gerald at the colonel's. During the day he usually remained at home. He never arose to breakfast now, and his indisposition was given as a reason why he should

not be disturbed until he chose to show himself, which was generally near the hour of noon. Every night he retired as soon as his supper was eaten, but a light was always seen burning in his room, and it was understood that he read a good deal, on account of inability to sleep.

It was from no fault of Gerald's that this entire week passed without his marriage taking place. He had tried, honestly enough, to find Moseley, but fate seemed against him. The justice was called away to another part of the State on the very day when Gerald left word that he wished to see him, and not thinking that the young man had anything of great importance to communicate he had gone on his journey, leaving word that he should be back in three or four days. As frequently happens the three or four days lengthened out to six or seven, and Alma had many sad hours in consequence. She felt each day that her position was growing more unbearable. She bitterly repented that she had not consented to the union when Gerald first proposed it. But each evening, when he came, he assured her that the affair would certainly take place on the morrow. And, clasped in his arms, close to the heart she now loved with all the passionate fervor of her nature, she forgot, at least for the hour, what a narrow gulf separated her from the yawning chasm at her feet.

The perfect confidence that Mary Carson had in her young mistress and her lover lulled the suspicions that might otherwise have arisen. Alma told her that it was useless for her to sit up longer than her usual home hour, now that they were to sleep always at the cottage, and that she herself would show Gerald

out and lock the gate and door behind him. Mary did not know that the time the young man left grew later and later, until at last he hardly escaped from the wood before the sun rose over the eastern hills. Even had she seen him go at that hour she would never have dreamed that anything wrong had happened. She might have thought it indiscreet not to avail himself of the cover of darkness, but nothing more. Much must be allowed to the fervor of the young couple whose wedding day—unknown though it might be to the world—was so near at hand.

John Garston, though he passed each night out of doors, did not spend his mornings in sleep. The near approach of his revenge was rest enough for him. A nap in his chair after dinner brightened his eyelids again. Night after night he lay concealed within twenty feet of the gateway which led to the cottage, and heard the whispered confidences between his son and his enemy's daughter at parting—confidences damning to their reputations—or at least to hers, for John thought that in such matters men have no reputations to lose. Damning was what he heard to that handsome girl, so like her mother in feature, so like her father in haughtiness, but soon to be broken like a reed by the man they had so long despised.

It was no small part of his joy that the boy they had not scrupled to take to their bosoms, so much better, in their opinion, than his sire, should be the instrument to bring shame and dishonor on their house! The man with a deep-seated hate forgets everything but his revenge. He forgets what was the original cause of his hatred, what mitigating circumstances have since arisen—everything but that



he has an account to settle, and that it has grown heavier by long delay.

The night that Gerald and Alma were startled by that unexpected sound, he had climbed into a large tree that overlooked the enclosure where the house stood, and from a secure position in the branches had beheld through the uncurtained window of the parlor the love-making within. It was a strange freak of the brain that the very sight he hoped for should cause him such indignation. But the thought, that his son—his Gerald—still loved this girl so blindly sapped the strength in his limbs and for the instant he lost his hold. Before a second had passed, however, he had slipped noiselessly from the tree to the ground and concealed himself further away.

The young people listened, with alarm depicted on both their faces, but soon came to the conclusion that the wind was responsible for the sound and gave it no further thought. They had become accustomed to each other's presence and the idea of interruption by mischievous outsiders never occurred to them.

At last Gerald was able to tell Alma that he had seen Moseley, and that the justice would tell him the next day where he could meet the couple and "unite" them without danger of detection. This pleased the girl so much that she redoubled her tenderness, and Gerald thought she had never been so sweet and charming as on that evening.

"But does it not have to be recorded?" she asked.

"Yes, according to law, but Moseley will take his time about it. Oh, you need not fear. He knows what is wanted and they will get no information



from him. In a month or two more, after you have arranged things with your father, he may tell the whole county for all we care. People would only laugh and say it was a young couple's adventure. There is considered nothing culpable in a match of that sort, now-a-days."

She drank in his words as though they were the water of life.

"And is such a marriage just as good—just as honorable—as one in a church?" she asked. "I want to be made yours as strong as the law can make me."

"Do you?" he answered, laughing merrily. "That is the way all women talk before the ceremony. At the divorce court they tell a different story."

She would not join in this mood of his.

"I want to be yours till death," she said, soberly. "I want to know that when I am laid in the earth your body will be beside me."

"What a grisly idea!" he cried, in mock affright. "It is enough for me now that I am to be beside you while you are living."

She nestled closer to him.

"I am afraid that you will respect me less, some day, because—"

"Hush! I should be a wretch to think of such a thing, when if there is any blame it is all my own. But it can never be. The proof of your love which I have had will only make you dearer."

He believed it! Men always believe those things—when they say them. It is not you alone, sweet girls, it is themselves they deceive. What madness fills your brains that you listen to them?

On the last night that Gerald spent with Alma they were longer even than usual in their parting at the gate, and they had become so confident of their isolation that their voices were not as low as they had once been. The concealed spy heard the assurance of his son that the morrow should surely see them united, though the marriage was to be kept for the present a secret. He knew now that the time for action had come. When the lovers had at last torn themselves from each other's embrace, and the key had been turned in the lock, Garston emerged from his hiding-place and followed rapidly in the footsteps of Gerald.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### "I KNOW HER CHARACTER."

The young man was so absorbed in contemplation as he threaded the wooded path, that he heard nothing of his pursuer until they were close together. When the step behind him smote on his ears he turned quickly to see whose it was, thinking to shape his conduct accordingly. The stern face of his father was something, however, for which he had made no preparation, and his eyes fell before it as he stopped to allow of his approach.

"You are out early," was Garston's first greeting.

"Yes. I did not sleep well and I thought a walk would do me good."

The reply was delivered in a tremulous voice, that

would not have been lost on even a less interested listener.

"*And she?*" said Garston, in a meaning tone, peering into the countenance of his son. "Did *she* also 'sleep badly?'"

How much did he know? How much did he only guess? Like lightning these thoughts flashed through Gerald's brain.

"Whom do you mean, sir?" he asked.

"Don't play innocence with me!" cried Garston, angrily. "I am in no mood to bear it! You cannot make me doubt the evidence of my eyes and ears. I know where you have been night after night, when you have pretended to be in your room. A fine piece of work, is it not? You are proud of it, I have no doubt!"

The manhood that lay at the bottom of the son's nature, though often obscured by grosser qualities, came to the surface.

"I told you long ago," he said, his voice grown firmer, "that I loved her. If I have visited her surreptitiously it is because you made it impossible for me to see her in any other way. I tell you again that nothing you can do or say will make me change my purpose to marry her."

Garston advanced as if to assault his son, but refrained.

"Insane boy," he exclaimed, in a tone of fury, "do you know what you are talking about? *Marry her!* Is that the kind of girl you would select for a wife? Do you want to *marry* a girl who is totally wanting in a sense of what is decent, who—"

Gerald was the one, this time, to threaten.

"Stop!" he cried warningly. "Say another word against her and I shall forget you are my father!"

"Strike me!" replied the elder man. "It would be in keeping with the rest of your conduct. Put another scar on my forehead to match the one *he* put there!" He removed his hat to show it, and Gerald looked at the dark red mark with a feeling of pain. "I am only your father. I have sacrificed my life for yours these twenty years, but that is nothing. Strike me, because I dare tell you that the girl is unfit for you. Strike me, I say! I assure you I know everything. You forgot, in your infatuation, even to draw the curtains of your room. Yes," for he saw the terrible effect this statement was making, "the fence is high and the boards are close, but the trees outside are higher! You can tell me nothing."

The horror of this revelation was so great that Gerald succumbed under it. He sank at his father's feet and covered his face with his hands. The ground seemed reeling from under him. Was this a man or a devil that he had been accustomed to revere?

Garston looked down on the prostrate figure, trying to measure his words to the best advantage.

"I could have forgiven you the folly of a temporary passion," he said. "I know the temptations of youth and that any man is liable to yield to illicit love. Disgraceful it certainly is, but not unpardonable. It is only when you talk of uniting my blood, which though that of a poor man is yet honorable, with that of a girl who has forgotten virtue—"

The sentence was not finished. The writhing

figure on the ground sprang like a panther to his feet.

"Before Heaven," he cried, "another word like that and I will murder you ! There is no claim that you have on me which permits you to slander the loveliest girl on earth, whose only fault, if it be one, is that she has loved too well such an undeserving man as I ! You say I have done wrong. If it be so, there is only one way that I can right it, and that is, to take her to my bosom before the world. And that I will do to-day, God permitting !"

This expression roused again the slumbering anger of the father. For a moment he had felt a sort of sympathy with his son, whose impetuous fury had proved how deeply he had been wounded. But now he hardened his heart again, and seizing Gerald in a vice-like grip, he held him at arm's length as easily as if he had been a child.

"Never shall you marry that creature !" he exclaimed. "Sooner will I take you to the lake there and drown you with my own hands ! Decide !" he vociferated, overcome with rage. "Either give her up or meet a dog's death !"

As he spoke he actually dragged Gerald toward the brink of the lake, which was but a few feet away, and the young man knew that he had one to deal with who was for the moment nothing less than a maniac. He did not want to die, and he thought it best to temporize, if it were not too late, with this terrible being who had that murderous clutch on his throat.

"Let me speak !" he stammered, tugging at the hands that held him. "Are you mad enough to carry out this fearful threat because we differ on a

water which is, after all, of more importance to me than to any one else?"

"I tell you again she shall not be your wife!" cried Garston, white with emotion. "It is impossible! Think, boy! The mother of your children must be above reproach! It were a thousand times better that you perished in the waters here than that you married such—"

The mute appeal in his son's eyes stopped him this time.

"Her maid has always been with us," faltered Gerald.

Garston smiled sardonically.

"It will not answer to say that—to me," he said. "I tell you I am not going by guess work. I love you with all my soul, but I would rather see your corpse brought to my gate than to have you marry the daughter of Alvah Adams—after what I know!"

Gerald's teeth chattered.

"Ah!" he cried. "You are a cruel man! Your hatred has led you to this—a hatred that you had no right to form in the first place, and that has grown until even the lifelong happiness of your only son must be sacrificed to it."

"No," was the reply. "Your happiness lies with Edith Staples, a girl against whom no man can bring a word of accusation. Come home and think about it. When you are calm, you will admit that I am right and that this passion that has brought you to so ignoble a pass is only temporary. Gerald," he continued, his voice growing gentler, "I love you. If I have seemed rough it was because of my anger at your continued opposition to what is surely for



**your best good. Come home with me, and let us talk it over."**

The two men vanished through the woods, walking slowly and talking as they went, and a third man came out of the thick clump of trees just above them, looking as if he had received a blow. It was Clifford Nelson, who had started out for an early walk, with no definite object in view, and had come suddenly within hearing of the angry voices. He had heard Garston's threat to drown his son, and had been ready at first to interfere if necessary to prevent that catastrophe. Then, as he caught further bits of the heated conversation, which showed him that Gerald had been visiting Alma at the summer-house under circumstances more or less open to suspicion, he felt almost willing to offer his aid to the murderous sire in case he was unable to carry out his purpose single-handed.

"His father has taken him away, and judging by the terror of his face he will mould him to his will," mused Nelson, as he walked back to the hotel. "He is a cur and a coward. But," and his face grew darker, "if talk comes of this, God help him!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## GERALD IN A FEVER.

Gerald was in such a highly nervous condition when he reached home that he was obliged to refuse breakfast and retired at once to his chamber, in the hope that sleep would give him temporary relief. His father had said such things in the way of argument that he hardly knew how to answer them, even to his own mind. He felt a certain guilt, and he was obliged to admit that a good deal of his conduct was not praiseworthy. Whatever his parent's mistakes, whatever his errors of judgment, he had surely been a thoughtful father to him. Never had he tried to balk him in anything until this case arose.

After going into his room he threw himself on the bed, where through his awakened mind ran the long list of kindly things that his father had done. The education which he had provided when the mortgagees stood at his elbow and he had to deny himself every luxury that his son might have it all! The way in which his trouble had been hid, lest it should annoy him, recurred to Gerald, as well as a hundred other instances of similar thoughtfulness. And in payment for this he had that morning addressed his father like a young hoodlum from the purlieus of South street! Gerald wondered that the roof over his head did not fall and crush him for an ungrateful scamp.

Still this father of his had driven him frantic for

the moment by what he said of Alma—words so totally uncalled for that patience fell before them. Gerald reflected that the suddenness of the assault upon his feelings mitigated his action, for it gave him no time to think. Poor Alma ! It would break her heart if she dreamed of it. He thought of her awhile and of the sweet tokens of her love which she had given him. He tried to repent of his wrong, but it was only on account of being detected that he was truly sorry. It is the “getting found out” that constitutes a violation of the latest and most important commandment.

The thoughts of Gerald kept returning to his father. Did he not owe him something in return for his years of kindness ? Was there no way to reconcile his duty to others with that which it was the right of this friend to demand ? It must be hard to bring a child to the age of manhood and find him stubbornly refusing to listen to advice meant for his best good.

There was Edith, too. A gentle feeling crept over him as her vision came across his mind. Beautiful as a lily, loving him with a tenderness none the less evident because partly hidden by a naturally reserved demeanor, it was no wonder that she had made an impression on the iron mind of his father. Gerald thought of the handsome way in which the Colonel and Mrs. Staples had always treated him, of the sweet hours he had passed with Edith. He had given her cause to think that she was the one destined to be his for life, and now he proposed to desert her ruthlessly. Contemptible as it was it had a double meanness after he had allowed her father to save his in his direst distress under an implied expectation. Ought he not to sacrifice everything

keep this obligation? Could he justify himself even for love's sake in deserving the contempt of honest men, after what had happened?

Then there came into his mind like the hazy beginning of a great fog that is to envelop everything in sight, the awful thought that his father had placed there, respecting the obligation of a woman who weds to be in all things above reproach. He had repelled it when it was uttered, and had felt arrayed against it all the forces of his being. But now it came back to him, and would not be driven out of his memory. A wife! A mother by-and-by, of his children! Was there anything in the insinuation that she who had permitted herself to yield once to illicit love might again find herself in some new field unable to withstand temptation?

No, it was outrageous! Alma had only surrendered when her great love had swept her into the vortex of the stream, and to the man whose wife she expected soon to be. Such a woman could never become the prey of adventurers—the deceiver of a husband whom she had learned to adore. It was a shameful calumny. The sweet, pure, gentle Alma, filled with the deepest affection, her very innocence to blame for her indiscretion! He tried to banish the thought, but it clung to him as poison ivy clings to a wall. His mind would go elsewhere for the moment, but it kept coming back to this.

“Damnation!” he cried. “How can a thing so baseless torture me so?”

His father came to see him at noon, and heard that he had not yet slept. Taking him by the hand he found that he was in a fever, and begged him to undress and compose himself to rest. Gerald replied

that he was well enough, and only wanted to be left alone. He declined to see a physician, stating that he was merely exhausted from his mental troubles and should be all right in a day or two. Garston knew that unless something was done a serious case of illness would follow, and finally induced him to take a quieting draught. He feared it would not have the intended effect, as Gerald's nerves were in such an excited condition, but in twenty minutes he was in so deep a slumber that his father undressed him and placed him in his bed without arousing him.

"I couldn't have had him going over there again to-day," muttered John to himself, as he looked at the quiet form. "He won't be likely to awake for five or six hours, and if he does I'll tell the housekeeper to give him a little more of it. While he is still, I'll drive over to see Moseley and put him off the track."

Mr. Moseley was surprised to see Mr. Garston alight at his door, but he understood everything, or thought he did, when John stated the case to him.

"Gerald's concluded to do the thing straight," said John. "I found out what he was up to, and as long as there's no help for it I gave in. He didn't want to come himself, and as I was driving over this way I said I'd let you know. Here's ten dollars for the trouble you've had."

Moseley's face, which had grown rather disheartened, brightened as he took the money.

"It's mum, you know," said Garston, with his finger on his lips.

"Oh, sartin'ly. I've done too much of this business to blab," smiled Moseley, with a significant look. "Nobody won't hear nothin' from me."

When Garston reached home he found that Gerald had not regained consciousness, but that he had talked almost constantly in his sleep and had made havoc with the bed clothes, requiring constant attention. Several times he had tried to leave the bed, and had been prevented with difficulty. The case seemed serious enough to warrant the calling of a medical man, and a messenger was dispatched for one.

Dr. Pease was one of those country practitioners who use a good deal more of common sense and considerably less drugs than some of their professional brethren. He shook his head when he smelled the opiate which Garston had given, saying it would have been better if he had been called in the first place, as such treatment would only retard the young man's recovery. John smiled grimly to himself, thinking that the doctor did not understand quite as much about the case as he might. It was essential above all things to keep Gerald in the house for a day or two.

"What has caused this?" asked Dr. Pease, when he and John were alone with the patient. "I find him in a good deal of mental excitement."

"I suppose it's due to a love affair, if you want to know," was the answer. "I guess a little rest and quiet will bring him around all right, doctor."

Dr. Pease glared at this presumptuous man, who thus presumed to tell him his business. *He* "guessed," indeed!

"Why, he's got a high fever," he replied. "His temperature is many degrees above what it should be. His pulse goes like a race horse. He'll have a month's sickness out of this, if you're not careful."



A month ! John was revolving it over in his mind. Well, he could stand a month and win. Perhaps a month in bed would settle everything.

The doctor wrote out a prescription and also a list of directions, which he said must be closely followed. Then, promising to call again in the course of the evening, he took his departure.

A month ! That would dispose of Alma. Her father would be home in a few days, and some method could be adopted to let him into enough of his daughter's secret to put him on his guard. Some day, when Gerald was safely married to Edith, and had gone far away, Garston meant to let Adams know the rest. He wanted to do this some time when the tidings would strike him like a sledge-hammer. But now the most that he hoped for was to obtain a complete separation between the young people. He did not mean that they should ever meet, if he could help it. He laughed at the thought that the doctor had supposed him a fool when he administered the opiate. There were some things that even college-educated men did not know ! If he could keep that boy in bed a month, or even a fortnight, he would play a winning card !

And yet this father, in the midst of his plot, loved that son of his ! In anything else he would have laid down his life to save him. His hatred had so choked his judgment that he really believed he was doing what would in the end bring to Gerald the greatest happiness.

It was late the next morning before the sick young man opened his eyes. When he did it was only to call in a feeble voice for a drink of water, and on receiving it he at once fell asleep again. At noon, the next

time he showed consciousness, he partook of a slight refreshment, as he had eaten nothing for nearly two days. Then he dozed again, and when he next knew what was going on—though it was only in a vague, uncertain way—he saw Colonel Staples and his father in the room.

"You are better, my dear boy?" said the Colonel, coming to his bedside.

"Do not agitate him," said Mr. Garston, warningly.

"I have no intention of doing so," replied the other.

Gerald had forgotten most things. The events of the preceding fortnight were not in his mind at all.

"Shall I tell Edith that you are better?" asked the Colonel. "She is very anxious for some favorable word from you."

"I did not know till now," said Gerald, feebly, "that I had been ill. But I am certainly better—much better."

"Edie will be so glad—"

Gerald threw off the clothes from his arms.

"Tell her that I will be down to see her to-night," said he.

"Not to-night," said his father, replacing the coverings, to Gerald's intense discomfort. "But soon. Tell her, Colonel, that he will be down soon. And," he added, cautiously, "if he has to remain in for several days more, she can come here with you."

This struck Gerald as strange. He had not got used to thinking of himself as an invalid, and he could not imagine Edith in that room under the circumstances. But as he did not like to exert himself with too much thought, he left it to his father to do

as it pleased him. Before the visitor had departed he was again in slumber, or at least a stupor that passed for it.

Edith was overwhelmed with grief when she heard from her father that Gerald was sick in bed, and that the doctor laid it to troubles of the mind, of which she feared that she had been in some way the cause. Her love had endured through all, though her pride had been sorely tested by his apparent neglect, but now she was ready to ascribe everything to the disease which was gradually stealing over him, and to forgive more readily than she had been to criticise. When the Colonel came home and told her that Gerald had sent a message that he hoped soon to see her there, her heart gave a great bound from joy. All was to come out right, after all. The clouds that had gathered over her head were only the fleeting banks of mist that come with September, and they would be gone in a few days, never to return!

Meanwhile, let the reader conceive the situation of Alma Adams—or rather, let him attempt to conceive it, for it is one of those things that nothing short of experience can convey to the mind. She had lived for two weeks on the presence of her lover, and on his promise that at the very earliest possible instant the law—in the person of its servant, Squire Moseley—should spread its curtain over the relations which they had sustained. On the last evening that Gerald passed with her he had designated the morrow as the day when the legal steps which she awaited so anxiously should be taken. He was to come early

in the evening and tell her where she and her maid should meet the justice.

She went to the summer-house and waited. *Eight o'clock.* It was perhaps too early to expect him, but she stood near the gate, ready to open it at the sound of his step. *Nine o'clock.* He must have some serious reason for delaying till that hour. *Ten.* He had never been so late. Her cheek paled until she was as white as he, lying at that moment in his bed at home. *Eleven!* TWELVE! ONE!

Mary Carson had retired and knew nothing of the weary vigil. Alma had no one to sympathize with her, and she wanted none, for her secret was one that could not be confided to mortals. With more unction than she had ever used in her life she knelt on the cold ground and lifted up her heart to God.

"O Thou who pitiest them that are in trouble, do not altogether desert me! I have been frail; I have been wicked. Punish me, if Thou wilt, but not *this* way! Send him to me, O God, before I quite lose hope! Send him to me, and my every act through life shall be in expiation of the grievous fault into which my wild love drove me!"

But the Deity does not always answer prayers like this in the way the petitioner desires. We are told that Jove laughs at lovers' perjuries. From the broad vault of heaven there comes no response to the agonized aspirations of the deserted maidens who day after day send up the same refrain. A thousand prayers will not prevent your arm from burning, pretty one, if you hold it in the flame.

Alma went in at last and fell exhausted on the sofa, where Mary found her in the morning. She gave monosyllabic replies to the few questions that

the maid put to her, and declined to leave the summer-house at all that day. Who could tell but he might come at some other hour, and what if he should come and find her absent? Her meals were brought to her and she sat there and waited, of course vainly. When it was evening again she felt sure he would come then. Her spirits rose as the sun went down. *Eight* o'clock again. *Nine!* *Eleven!* There was nothing to sustain her any longer, and she gave vent to her grief in copious tears.

Then, as if she had not enough to bear her down, a new trouble came. A letter was brought to the cottage by one of the house servants, bearing the postmark New York, and in it was most startling news. Her mother had suddenly grown worse, and the Eastern physicians had advised that she be taken back at once to her home in Jefferson. Mr. Adams had got as far as New York with her, when she sank rapidly and further journeying was out of the question. He had taken her to a hotel, where it had become only too evident that her days were numbered.

"I cannot deceive you, my poor child," wrote her father, and the paper was damp with the tears that had fallen upon it. "If you would see your mother alive you must take the earliest train. Even then it may be too late. Prepare for the worst."

That strength that sometimes accompanies despair enabled Alma to read this letter to Mary Carson and to make preparations for their departure with some show of courage. There is something in knowing that fate has done its deadliest. Gerald had deserted her and now her mother was to be taken. Coldly

And calmly, the people at the house thought she prepared for a hasty journey, and took the train for the East.

Her mother had been dead two days when she reached there, and her broken-down father leaned upon her as the only comfort left to him. It was an additional weight on her young shoulders to realize how little comfort she ever could be to him again—to him or any one. That knowledge which brings a happy light to the face of the wedded wife had come to her now—but it was to blast and sting. She knew that she should have to go far away from this kind father—left with no one else to lean on—and hide her shame as best she might from the prying eyes of the heartless world.

She might have gone to Gerald with an officer of the law, or with a revolver, as she had somewhere read of a deserted woman's doing, and demanded justice. But she had no thought of anything like that. It was not justice she wanted, but love. If he had been willing to renounce her so coldly she could never follow him for a mere technical justification. He was safe from her wrath, and as for her scorn, how could it affect so brazen a heart as his?

The body of her mother was put for the present in the tomb, as Alma begged her father not to return yet to his home. She said it would seem desolate there, now that the dear voice would never be heard again within its walls, and he yielded to the sentiment. One day Mary Carson, who had returned to Jefferson to take charge of things, sent Alma, enclosed in one of hers, a letter from Gerald. Mr. Adams opened it by the purest mistake, for he would not have stooped to touch his child's correspondence



intentionally, and was startled to find that it enclosed a brief note from the young man with whom he had supposed her acquaintance ended. Feeling justified now in seeing what he had to say, he read it through :

"My darling," ran the letter, "after many days of illness I am permitted to go out again, though I am still very weak. My first trip was to the cottage where I hoped to find you, but it was locked and wore a deserted appearance. I shall send this by a trusty messenger to Mary, knowing that she will see that it gets to you. Tell me that I still have your love and that you will meet me as soon as I am able to see you. My father watches me closely, under pretence that the doctor orders me to be kept free of excitement, and I shall have to elude him as best I can. I am too tired to write more, but I shall see you soon and then all will be well.

"Yours till death,

"GERALD."

Mr. Adams put the letter into his pocket. He had no idea of giving it to Alma. He was sorry to learn that Gerald still pretended to claim his daughter, but there was nothing in the note to show that she encouraged him. It was much wiser to keep it from her—very much wiser.

"Father," she said to him, soon after, "I do not want to go home again for a very long time. It seems as if I could not bear it there. I am not well. I want to take a long journey somewhere, and see if it does not help me."

"How would you like to cross the ocean?" he

asked, looking at her tenderly. "I heard yesterday of a lady who wanted one more to complete a party that she is to chaperone."

"I should like it," she answered, eagerly. "Yes, that is it—I want to go far away."

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## **CHAPTER XXIX**

**"I THINK I COULD KILL HIM!"**

When Mary Carson started for home, leaving the Adamses in New York, Alma gave her this parting injunction: "Write me nothing about matters in Jefferson outside of our own family affairs." Mary did not think this enough to warrant her in suppressing or returning the letter which Gerald sent, and the contents of which she had no means of knowing. She was aware that something had occurred between him and her young mistress, but Alma had refused positively to discuss the causes that had led to their separation. The whole truth, or any part of it even, she never suspected. It was common gossip in Jefferson when she reached there, and she heard it from the other servants, that Gerald had been very ill, and that Colonel Staples' carriage, with Edith as one of its occupants, had been driven each day to the Garston farm. Nothing less than an understood engagement could explain this, though the Stapleses were reticent and gave no satisfaction to those who tried to "pump" them on the subject.

Mary was greatly grieved at the turn affairs had taken, as she knew that Alma had suffered intense distress about it. She had never ceased to think that they were a couple that nature had designed for each other, but if men were so fickle before marriage, perhaps it was best. Mary thought on this so seriously that she turned an unusually cold shoulder upon a thriving young mechanic of the village who had been more or less encouraged in his suit for her own hand. At which the young man in question waxed melancholy, and began to contemplate the various methods of suicide.

Clifford Nelson, at the Jefferson House, was also in anything but a happy frame of mind. His love for Gerald had given way to a pronounced sense of injury, and even the reports of the precarious condition of the young man found in him but little if any regret.

The fortune that he had inherited made it easy for him to do without the profession that he had intended to follow, and he wrote to the Chicago firm with whom he had been studying that he could not tell when, if at all, they would see him again in their office. He said he was not feeling as well as he should like, and wanted a rest. As this tallied very closely with a letter they had received from Mr. Garston, describing Gerald's case, the lawyers began to wonder what there could be in the atmosphere in Jefferson that had such a precisely similar effect on the two young gentlemen. And they speculated shrewdly among themselves whether the handsome young ladies, with whom they had sometimes met their students, had anything to do with the matter.

Nelson stayed in Jefferson until he could no longer doubt that the engagement of Gerald and Edith was a fixed fact. The *Jefferson County Eagle*, with the enterprise for which that paper was famous, announced it under the head of "Society Notes." The hotel boarders discussed it at dinner. The crowd at the post-office made it the theme of their evening's gossip, and those who disliked Adams—always a respectably large minority—did not attempt to conceal their pleasure. Colonel Staples walked or rode through the town with a wise air, and Edith's face was wreathed in smiles in place of the troubled look that had been seen there so frequently a few weeks before. People took courage to ask her how Gerald was, now that all could see the openness with which she visited him, and she told them without hesitation that he was getting better rapidly and would soon be out again. Some of the more courageous asked if she had heard anything recently from Alma, and, with something of the sad look returning, she announced that she had received but one letter, a brief answer to her condolences.

"She must be sadly hurt, poor girl," she said, softly, to one lady whom she thought an especial friend. "She was very fond of her mother, as she deserved to be, and I fear it will be long before she recovers from the shock. She does not mean to come home at present. Her father wants her to travel and divert her mind."

Armed with this definite news the lady in question began to make herself a person of consequence by disseminating it right and left in the village, and before night it reached the ears of Clifford Nelson.

He did not wish to meet Gerald when he became able to be about again, for he feared that his patience would give way at sight of him—that he should forget that it was an invalid with whom he had to deal. He packed his trunk, took the train for Buffalo, and after passing a few days there, made a sudden decision to cross the Atlantic and see if he could not find, somewhere on the other side, relief from the distress that he was experiencing.

Nelson had no notion of dying of unrequited love. He was much too healthy a young man to entertain any such idea as that. But he had suffered a good deal of late, and he did not feel like studying. He wanted a complete change of scene, and having the means to obtain it, and nothing to prevent, he saw no reason why he should hesitate to follow his inclination.

He had not been long in London when, one morning, happening to glance over the list of American arrivals, he found the name of "Miss Alma Adams" in that of a party headed by "Mrs. Gustave Lenoir." At first he thought the similarity in name a mere coincidence, but as there was a possibility that it was the Alma of his acquaintance, he went to the address given. He sent his card to Mrs. Lenoir, and explained the object of his visit. From her he learned that he had not come in vain, and a few minutes later Miss Adams made her appearance.

Alma was more than pleased to see him. She had been suffering from a severe attack of homesickness, that trouble which often comes during the first days that one spends on foreign soil, and it was comforting to meet any one whom she had ever seen in dear America. More than this she had the greatest respect

for Clifford, and even in her unhappy condition of mind she had no reason to avoid him. Their first conversation was upon the voyage they had both taken, and upon the sights they had thus far seen.

"I trust you left your father well," he ventured, finally.

"Yes, except for his great depression of spirits. You," she indicated her garments to explain what she did not like to put into speech, "you have heard—"

He bowed with an air of grave sympathy.

"Do you intend to remain in Europe long?"

"I have no settled plan."

She reddened as she said it, for it seemed as if he could read her thoughts.

"Although I have joined Mrs. Lenoir's party, I do not mean to remain with it beyond a—a certain time."

"Then you will return this winter, perhaps?"

"No, that is not certain."

She seemed so confused that he hastened to relieve her, by saying that he supposed her plans were like those of other travellers—dependant on circumstances. He asked, however, that he might have the privilege of calling upon her occasionally while she remained in London, and of escorting her to some of the places of interest. He was very courteous about it, and she readily responded that she should be glad to have him do so.

"You have been through a great deal of unhappiness," he said, "and your best way now is to vary your life all you can. I, too, have received a blow, harder perhaps than you think. Although you must have known that I cared very much for her I kept



my sentiments closely hidden, and I believe their real depth was never suspected by you any more than by Miss Staples. When I read in the *Eagle* that she—that they—were soon to be married—”

He stopped, alarmed. Alma had sunk back in her chair as if every particle of strength had left her. He sprang up, saying that he would ring immediately for assistance.

“No,” she replied, in so faint a voice that he could hardly hear her. “It is nothing. I am quite recovered.”

“I regret,” said he, “that I alluded at all to a subject which could not fail to be painful. In thinking of my own sorrow I did not take other things sufficiently into account. But surely, I have brought you no news?”

She struggled with her emotions for a moment before she answered.

“He is to marry Edith, you say?”

“I cannot doubt it. Not only the *Eagle*, but common report says so. When I came away he was ill, and she visited at his house daily. You loved her,” he added, gently.

She looked up at him mournfully.

“Loved her? Loved Edie? I love her still. I shall write to her, sending my”—how ghastly she grew—“my congratulations. But I did not know, Mr. Nelson, that *you* cared for her. No, I never guessed that.”

“Did you not? Then I succeeded in what I tried to do. So long as there was the least possibility that Gerald wanted to win her, I knew it would be useless to speak.”

She contracted her brows in puzzled pain.

"But—it must have been something very recent," she said. "You had no fear of his rivalry when—when we were at school, and—after we came home."

He wondered what he ought to say to her.

"Gerald knew you both so long before I did that I seemed to find no place ready for me. That made me keep silence."

He looked at Alma for a moment, and then his wrongs overcame him.

"Oh, it is a wicked shame!" he cried. "Hardly six weeks ago I met him in the wood one night and he told me, with every appearance of earnestness, that he cared for but one woman in the world, and that was—you!"

Her breath came in short gasps, and her countenance brightened.

"Yes—yes!" she exclaimed.

"It is his father who has influenced him," continued Nelson. "She loves him, too. They have surrounded him with their toils."

She leaned toward him, confidentially.

"I must tell you something, Mr. Nelson, that you may understand the cruelty of my position. We were engaged—as honestly engaged as any couple could be. Why, I had even, in response to his repeated importunities, consented that we should have a secret marriage, lest our parents should interfere and tear us apart. He had spoken to a justice of the peace named Moseley, who lives in Linwood, and on the very next day after I last saw Gerald we were to be united. He left me as happy and apparently as true as you could imagine, and from that day I have never had a letter from him, nor any word whatever!"

"London is not agreeing with Miss Adams," he said to Mrs. Lenoir, some days later. "How much longer do you intend to remain here with your party?"

"That is undecided," she answered. "We expect to go to the Riviera in January, but I do not know how much earlier we shall leave London. I think her only trouble is that she has overdone. If you will be content, Mr. Nelson, to spend your afternoons at the hotel instead of in cabs and galleries, you will find her much better soon, I am sure."

He blushed at the imputation that he could thus easily control her movements.

"I hope you are right," he said, "and that all she wants is rest. I shall certainly encourage her to take it to the fullest extent. But I am afraid that she needs the fair skies of the South of France, and that the London fogs are ruining her naturally happy disposition."

Mrs. Lenoir looked at him archly. She had recently received word by mail to encourage him in every way.

He went back to Alma and found her so white that he was intensely alarmed.

"This town is destroying you!" he exclaimed.

"It is only a temporary affair," replied Alma, though the pain in her face did not bear out the statement. "I shall be better—soon."

"What is the matter?" he asked, kindly. "Tell me."

She started at the unexpected question.

"*He* is here, in London—with *her*," she articulated, slowly, her eyes growing stony as she spoke. "I saw the names in the *Register*. He will marry her. I

expect it. Dear, dear Edie! I can not even throw my poor arms about her neck and breathe the wish I have—God knows I have it!—that she will be happy. I dare not trust myself to see her. It is useless to deny it to you. I love him at this moment as much as I ever did! Could I ask a great favor of you—one which I can ask of no one else—one that I would not think of asking did I not believe in the nobleness and unselfishness of your nature?"

He trembled with apprehension, but he said she could ask him what she wished and he would pledge himself in advance to do it.

"You say I am ill," she went on, after a pause. "It is true. There is no need of calling a physician, for I am not possessed of any malady that he could cure. In a week from to-day I shall be better—or I shall be dead. Yes, I dreamed of it last night—it will be one or the other. Now what I ask of you—and I know how much it is to ask—is this. If I do die, go to Gerald." The sobs came again and nearly choked her utterance. "Go to him and tell him where I lie, in—in my casket. Ask him—to—come to me—just for a minute. It will be no wrong to her—I shall be dead. And—no matter what you may think—don't blame him—don't do anything to take away the chance of happiness that he will have with her."

She left the room abruptly, unable to say another word, and he sought Mrs. Lenoir with a gloomy countenance.

"Miss Adams is hysterical to-night," he said. "She needs extra care. You must not leave her alone."

"I think I could kill him!" he added mentally, as he went down the steps of the house into the street.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## ON THE WAY TO LONDON.

The visits of Edith Staples to the bedside of Gerald Garston added to the confusion of mind into which he had been thrown by the extraordinary events of the previous few days. Weak from the illness which had been coming on for some time, more or less under the influence of the opiate which his father persisted in giving him in minute quantities, notwithstanding the warning of Dr. Pease, and conscious that he had not treated Edith well, Gerald accepted her ministrations, with few words beyond those of thankfulness. Whenever he had strength enough to form consecutive impressions his mind turned to Alma, who must, he thought, be anxious about him, and to whom he would gladly, had there been any feasible way, have sent some message testifying the still unchanged character of his affection. One day it even occurred to him to ask Edith to carry this word to her, and then it came upon him like a tornado that he had the double task of relieving the distress of Alma and soothing the injured feelings of his new nurse. He saw that he was in danger of doing something foolish if he attempted anything in his feeble condition, and he desisted from forming plans, preferring to wait until he could be about and decide with the full use of unharmed intelligence.

It was on the second day that he was able to walk out of doors, that he took his way to the summer

house, in the hope to find Alma where he had left her. His father knew well that this would probably be his move, and knowing that the cottage was locked he did not try to stop him in this useless journey. Gerald crept weakly through the path in the wood, and tried the gate, which was securely fastened. He went to the nearest point at which the house approached the fence and called "Alma" in a low tone. Then, when nothing but the echo of his own voice answered him, he turned wearily away, and started for his home, reaching there greatly fatigued in body and discouraged in mind. The exertion compelled him to remain in-doors for several days. As soon as he could bear the strain he obtained writing utensils and indited the letter which Mary Carson afterwards sent to Alma, and which her father intercepted. It was easy to get this to the post-office, for the farm hands had no orders in relation to his correspondence, and his father did not know or suspect what he was doing. But when a week passed and no reply was received, Gerald began to experience the greatest uneasiness. Dr. Pease declared that something must be done to calm his mind or he would fall into a brain fever, with possibly dangerous results.

"He needs a change of scene," said the physician. "As soon as he is able to travel he ought to be taken away from here."

The *Jefferson County Eagle* contained a long article upon the death of Mrs. Adams, reciting in the true country manner the virtues and high character of the deceased. The paper containing this, which at the same time stated that Miss Alma had gone to the East and would remain there some time, was



placed purposely where it could not help being seen by Gerald. He was much shocked by the news, but experienced a sort of comfort in it, as it explained to a certain extent the absence of any reply to his letter. He had no doubt that as soon as the first flush of her grief was over, Alma would write, and he tried to content himself to wait. But the courage which he acquired was not to be of long duration, for in a subsequent number of the same journal he found an item stating that she had gone abroad to finish her education, and would not return, probably, for a number of years.

The paragraph giving this information was partly the result of ingenious surmise on the part of the reporter of the *Eagle*, but its effect on Gerald was most pronounced. At first it paralyzed him, and then it aroused his fury. He could see nothing but that Alma had deserted him when he was helpless from illness, without even the formality of a written or spoken word. "Gone abroad to remain for years!" Was ever anything so thoroughly heartless? Could this be the Alma he had known? Had his brain, reeling under the effect of illness, played him a trick? Were all those sweet memories mere illusions of a distempered imagination?

He tried to think. Had she not lain in his arms, with her lips to his, and her hair wound around his eyes that he might not see the blushes that dyed her cheek a deeper color than carmine? Had her form, pulsating with youth, never been clasped to his heart? Had she never whispered responses to his glowing declarations, and had they never sworn to each other that life itself should be too short to prove their constancy?

When was this? A month ago by the calendar. A century, by the suffering that the separation had given him.

Could he be mistaken? Was it not true that she had urged that he hasten the day when she might vow her life to him? Had he never arranged with Moseley to come and satisfy the demands of custom? It was all as clear to him as the sun shining there in the sky. He had agreed with the official to meet him and he had told Alma that the day was set. What then? Why—yes—he had met his father in the wood, and—after that came unconsciousness. Alma had waited for him and the justice, and when he did not arrive she had shown the slenderness of her love by suspecting *him* of untruth. The death of her mother had taken her to New York, and afterward, hearing nothing from him—taking it for granted that he had deserted her—she had concluded to go abroad.

What a specimen of the fickleness of woman! There could have been nothing like the passion which animated him in her breast or she would never have jumped at conclusions in such a reckless manner. Thus the bitter reflections surged through his brain, for hours after he read this paragraph, and he saw no ray of comfort anywhere on the horizon.

When one has nothing to do but think, and think, and think, one's mind is apt to lead him astray. When one is rising from a sick bed one's brain is easily persuaded of whatever appears on the surface of things. Gerald passed through agonies of regret for the girl he had lost, agonies of remorse for the wrong he had done her, and agonies of vindictive rage for the cold way in which she had taken her-

self out of his reach. His self-love, his conscience, his desire for her presence, dominated him one after the other, each taking its turn, until he did not know what he thought or what he wanted.

Out of the chaos only one thing loomed clear on his vision. Alma had gone and Edith remained.

Gentle Edith! Sweet, tender, patient Edith! Not a word of love had passed between them during these days when she had come to cheer his loneliness, bringing that one ray of light into his life, now tied to such narrow limits. What could he do to reward such sweet devotion? Ought he to permit it to go on? He had no strength to solve this problem. It pleased his father to have her there, and the bright smile on her countenance as she entered his room showed that it gave her pleasure to come

Alma had gone and Edith remained. He could remember when he had told Cliff Nelson that he did not know which one of them he loved best. He looked back now on his mad infatuation with Alma, when he had dared everything to be by her side. Had he chosen Edith his path would have been as smooth as a sea of summer. Why had his fancy enveloped the other with all glories, till he could see nothing in this girl, who had loved and still loved him with a flame that no wind of circumstance could lessen?

Then he went back again in memory to those evenings in the summer-house. What right had Alma to lift him to heaven and then drop him into the depths of hell! He wanted to see her once more and discover what had wrought this awful change. But the thought of being again in her presence threw him into another fever. He did not

know whether he should smother her with kisses—willing or unwilling—or drive a knife into that now false heart, that had beaten responsive to his through the fair breast that intoxicated him.

Colonel Staples and Mr. Garston were much pleased when, upon approaching the subject delicately to him, they found that he was quite willing to take a journey to the Old World. Garston said he should go, too, as he had always wanted to see Europe and the season of winter was the only one he could well spare for that purpose. Edith was to accompany her father, and Gerald understood that this was decided upon wholly without reference to himself. On the whole he was glad she was going. He dreamed that it would be possible, in those quiet days that they would pass on the sea, to have the honest talk with her that he had meant to have for months past. For there was no moment during this time that Gerald viewed Edith as a possibility in marriage. That might have been once, but now their paths had diverged. It was too late to change things. He had been too far on the other road ever to return.

The voyage was uneventful. Day after day Gerald sat with Edith on the deck, where their fathers left them to themselves with undisguised approbation. Gerald acquired physical strength, but the courage that he hoped for to tell Edith that he had loved and lost and never could love again—to tell her this in the delicate way that he felt was her due—did not come to him. There was something dishonorable in allowing her to go on under the belief that things were different, but try as he might he was unable to set her right.

John Garston had many talks with the Colonel, the burden of which was that all that was needed was a little time.

"The boy has been very sick, you know," he said. "He will recover rapidly over here. They will be thrown constantly together, and only one result can follow."

"Do you think he has entirely gotten over his feelings toward Alma?" asked the Colonel, nervously.

"Entirely. Have no fear. You will return to America with a wedding party."

"Alma is in Europe somewhere, you know."

"Yes, with a chaperone who will take good care that she does not get out of her sight. I know Adams. He never sent her here without full instructions to meet every case. He has been as fearful that there should be anything between them, since that day of the auction, as he was anxious for it before."

When a man is desirous of being convinced it does not take much to convince him, and the worthy Colonel found his fears for his daughter's happiness giving way to rose-colored expectations, as he noted the confidence of his companion.

They left the steamer at Queenstown, took the usual short run through Ireland, crossed to Scotland, where they spent a fortnight, and then, by easy stages, stopping at many places of interest, came to the world's metropolis.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

## A CRY FOR HELP.

Gerald had not been twenty-four hours in London before he began to realize that he was practically under guardianship. He occupied the peculiar position of being in a foreign land with hardly a dollar in his pocket and with watchful eyes following his every movement. It was no part of the purpose of his father that he should be able to take journeys of his own in any direction that he might fancy, and his purse had been carefully restricted with that end in view. Under the pretence that funds had not arrived, John Garston gave his son only the smallest sums, and Gerald's pride prevented him from asking the only other person in the party to whom he could have applied—Edith's father—for anything.

London meant to the young man more than all else the place where Alma had undoubtedly been—perhaps where she still was—and the fever that had smouldered in his veins grew hotter as time passed on. They might surround him with all the barriers they pleased, but he resolved that it should avail them nothing. If he could not find the one he loved, at least they should not make him wed another. He had never really recovered from his illness. Mr. Garston continued to supply him with opiates disguised in his medicine. Generally he wore an appearance of extreme melancholy. Edith was much troubled by this, and appealed to her



father to know if something could not be suggested to turn the current of his thoughts.

"I never saw Gerald so unhappy," she said. "Sometimes I feel as if he did not care for me. I would rather die than marry him if I thought that. The voyage does not seem to have done him much good thus far."

The colonel was all this time in a quandary. He had given out to the reporter of the *Eagle* that his daughter and Gerald were engaged, and that they would probably return from Europe man and wife. All Jefferson expected this, and if it did not occur there would be a suspicion that Edith had been jilted. Garston was constantly at his elbow, ready to meet any doubt, and the Colonel was more than willing to be convinced.

"Don't be in haste, and all will be well," said Garston, repeatedly. "All he wants is a little more time."

It takes something more than common espionage to control the every movement of a young man of twenty-three, even under the disadvantageous conditions of a case like the one in question. Gerald found by a newspaper that he picked up at the hotel that Clifford Nelson was at the Victoria. Little as he had cause to hope for help from him, it was a straw worth catching at in his helpless dilemma, and he smuggled a note to the address, stating his position, and begging Cliff, for the sake of old times, to come to his rescue.

"I am still suffering from the effects of the long illness I have had," he wrote, "and though they give me medicine constantly it does me no good. I feel that it is too late for me to hope to regain the love

of Alma, and I shall try to reconcile myself to its loss ; but this steady pressure toward another alliance is wearing me out. I fear that some day I shall yield, and then there will be a future of misery for both myself and Edith. I have not a dollar that I can call my own. If I had enough to take me back to America I would fly from this danger, and once there I would take care that they never got me again into their power. You hate me for the vacillation of which I was guilty, but you can afford to be magnanimous, now that I have lost the only thing I care for. If I have done wrong—and Heaven knows how dearly I regret my conduct—my punishment is already severe enough. If you can send me twenty pounds, which I will repay as soon as I can earn it, you may save two people from a lifetime of unhappiness.”

The messenger who took this note reported that Mr. Nelson had left the Victoria and gone to live at some other hotel, and that the clerks would forward the letter to his new address as soon as they could ascertain it. There was something very dispiriting in this report, for it might mean that Clifford had left the city, and in Gerald's mood he naturally looked at the darkest side of everything. A week went by and nothing was heard from his former friend. He thought it more than probable that the note had reached him, and that his contempt for the sender had induced him to meet his request by a dead silence. If he had done so, Gerald felt that he could not blame him. It would not be easy for Cliff to despise him more than he despised himself. He was plunged into the greatest despondency, and in this state of mind his father found him, when he came to have a final talk upon the situation.

"It is time that I spoke to you plainly," he said, with that hard, cold ring to his voice that his son had of late learned to know so well. "You have now been in England nearly a month. What excuse can you find for longer postponing your marriage? I know what you will say—that you do not love Edith. It is enough that she loves you, and that you have given her every reason to think she is to be your wife. There is no honorable way now in which you can escape making good the understanding you have had with her. She is a beautiful girl. The marriage will make me happy and relieve us all. Try to think of this as your duty, and it will seem easier."

Gerald was too disheartened to answer for some minutes. There was no avenue open to him in any direction, except the one his father pointed out. Perhaps, he sadly thought, they were all right and he was wrong. Alma had turned her back upon him deliberately. The only friend he had thought it possible could aid him had either gone from London or had disdained to answer his letter imploring assistance. If he could not hope for happiness himself, here was at least a way in which he could impart it to others.

"Let me think of it till to-morrow," he said, at last.

"Settle it to-day; it is much better," was the reply. "Say that I may arrange for the marriage—it will be an entirely private affair—and that will relieve me of the constant fear that I may be placed in the position of a falsifier to a gentleman and his daughter who have been the soul of kindness to both of us. Tell me that you will go to Edith and ask her to name the earliest hour when you may

carry out the promises that you made months and months ago."

The young man wavered, and then consented to all that his father had asked. It repaid him to some degree when his parent grasped him by the hand with a cordiality the like of which he had never known him to show, and thanked him warmly.

Having made up his mind, Gerald felt an elation for which he was not prepared. He had been for so many weeks in a state of uncertainty that it relieved him to have his course decided, even though it was not the one on which he had fixed his mind. He went to Edith, who was in her own apartments, and surprised her by an affectionate embrace, as she opened the door to him. In quite his old manner, tempered only by such soberness as the occasion might well demand, he told her that he hoped she would be ready for the ceremony that was to unite them, as soon as the preliminaries could be arranged.

There were few preparations necessary. The plan was to send out for some non-conformist clergyman, and take the vows quietly. She had no costumes to procure and no list of friends to invite. All this was talked over, and before he left her the day was set for the following Thursday. He returned to his father, who anxiously awaited him, and reported what he had done, and John Garston went at once to Colonel Staples and communicated the information.

The reader who is inclined, very properly, to reproach the parents of these young people for their conduct should reflect that similar means have been used in all ages of the world to accomplish similar

ends, and that the intended happiness of the ones to be married has been in most cases the reason alleged. Garston had his revenge against Adams to satisfy, but the Colonel thought of nothing but the future of his daughter. The fact that she loved Gerald was enough for him. Once united there would be, he fully believed, no inharmony between them. To Edith's doubts he always replied that Gerald's illness was responsible for everything that was strange in his manner, and that she might be sure that all the clouds that lowered above them would disappear in the fair sunshine of their wedded life.

Until the morning of his marriage day arrived, Gerald did not give up hope of hearing from Clifford. That was the only chance that now remained to him. He looked in his box with eagerness, rising before the others to make sure that he got whatever was sent to him, but nothing came. Feeling that no other course was now open, he put on the best face he could.

As he entered the presence of the clergyman a chill came over him, and he feared lest the others should hear the chattering of his teeth. When it was his turn to answer the questions put to him he showed much awkwardness. But it was finally accomplished. He had sworn before high Heaven to take this woman for life, for death, in sickness and health, and to keep himself unto her till death should them part!

"May I kiss the bride?"

It was John Garston who asked it, and Edith looked up, pale and trembling, for she had noticed with pain that her husband, in his aberration, had



neglected to take that first kiss, usually so eagerly sought by the newly-wedded groom.

"After Gerald," she whispered, and in spite of all she could do, the tears came to her blue eyes.

Gerald heard her like one in a dream. He kissed her, and when both his father and hers had followed suit, the clergyman left them.

Garston had planned a little wedding breakfast, but the condition of his son decided him against having it served. He talked it over with Colonel Staples and they concluded that the best thing was to send the bridal couple at once to another hotel, where rooms had been engaged for them. He handed Gerald a purse with more than the twenty pounds he had so craved—now, alas! too late to be of use—and with a few words that bade him be of better courage, said good-by to him until the next day. Edith clung with something like fear to her father ere they separated, and he had all he could do to restrain his feelings.

Gerald had hardly entered the carriage which was to take his bride and himself to their temporary abode before he had resolved, as well as he was capable of resolving upon anything, that he would never consummate this union. The touch of the purse that he had in his pocket had aroused all the old dread of this marriage, and awakened a determination to escape. It would be cruel to desert this fair girl at such a time, but would it be any less so months hence? He knew that the separation would have to come, sooner or later. He realized how villainously he had acted, but he thought the best way now was to act up to his convictions, no matter at what cost. He liked Edith, as he had always done,



but Alma alone had taught him to feel what love was. He had done a wicked act in standing up and uttering those lies, but he would carry it no farther.

Unconsciously, with the tenderest feelings in his mind for his bride, he placed his arms about her as they rode through the crowded streets, and she, knowing nothing of what passed through his mind, nestled gratefully against his bosom. But before they reached their new hotel he had decided upon the course he would follow. They were shown to their suite, comprising a little parlor, bedroom and bathroom, beautifully furnished, and here for the first time they found themselves wholly alone.

It was not a pleasant situation for him. He did not mean to arouse her suspicions, and neither did he intend to stultify himself by indulging in those extra attentions which the logic of events might have seemed to demand. The first thing he did was to order breakfast, for neither of them had eaten anything except the smallest lunch that morning. When the waiter said, "You'll 'ave it hup 'ere, sir, hof course?" he replied with due hauteur, "Certainly not. Serve it in the breakfast room, and notify me when it is ready." He meant to be absolutely alone with his wife—*gods!* how that word sounded!—as little as he could.

After they had eaten breakfast, which filled in the time remaining till nearly noon, he proposed that they take a long ride into the country, and Edith acceded, as she felt in duty bound to do. He selected Hampton Court, though it was not the season when many visitors go thither, because it would take a long time to go and return, and he must dispose of the

afternoon in some way. They talked of the scenes through which they passed, and examined the paintings in the galleries when they arrived, and no person who saw them imagined that they were wedded that day. It grew rather dark before they reached home, and he found his arm encircling her again. He liked her, and he felt a sympathy for her, and after all it could not do much harm.

At the hotel dinner was ready, and both ate with fair appetites. He lingered as long over the walnuts and wine as he could find excuse for, and then went slowly with her to the parlor they occupied.

"I shall have to leave you for an hour or two," he said, immediately. "There is a little business that I have to attend to. It may keep me out quite late. You had best not sit up. If you mind being alone—"

"Oh, no. Not at all," she replied.

He stooped and kissed her, and she met his lips shyly. He would have avoided it if he could, but it seemed necessary. Then he went out into the streets, and inquired of the first policeman he met the nearest way to the offices of the American steamers. Miraculously, the man knew enough of the locality to answer the question, for one of the offices was very near the place where they stood. Gerald accepted the directions given and started to walk to it.

His plan was to take the first boat, of whatever line, that sailed for the western shores. Before leaving London he intended to write a full statement of what he was about to do to Colonel Staples and his father. He proposed to tell them that under no conceivable circumstances would he ever return to Edith,

and that he hoped they would all forget him as soon as possible. He meant to tell them his regret that he had not had strength of mind to refuse the union, and that his only reason for his present course was that he did not love his wife as he felt a husband ought. He meant to ask them to make the blow as light to her as they could, and to assure her that he felt the shame of what he felt compelled to do.

When he reached the steamship office he learned that there was no boat going before Saturday. This was something on which he had not counted. It seemed to indicate that he would have to postpone his departure until the next day, and he wondered what he could do in the meantime. If he went back to Edith, what excuse could he make to her for seeking another apartment? Illness? That was not sufficient to part a wife and her husband. Her place would be by his side, and she would demand it. Bitterly he regretted that he had not done what he ought at the start, instead of getting into this muddle. What had become of the common sense that he had once? Surely there had been a day when he was not such a coward.

Should he not go direct to Edith and tell her the truth? No, anything but that. He could not meet her affrighted eyes, her horror-stricken face! But he must do something. *What? What? WHAT?*

He went into a hotel and wrote the letter he had decided upon. He walked after that through unfamiliar streets, with the fearful question unanswered, till the clock struck ten. Then he saw a carriage standing in front of a handsome residence, and a man being forced down the steps, and heard a cry for help.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## WHERE WOMEN RISK DEATH.

Seeking to find some relief from his own depression, as well as from the constant strain which his meetings with Alma now put upon him, Clifford Nelson engaged the services of a guide and spent considerable time inspecting the parts of London into which the ordinary traveler is not supposed to penetrate. It is said that no one person knows the whole of that vast Babel, but this man came as near it as any one could. He was a veritable encyclopædia of everything within ten miles of St. Paul's Cathedral, having made it a business to show strangers about ever since he was a very young man, as had his father before him.

"There's a house the business of which you would not be likely to suspect from the appearance of the exterior," he said, one day, as they passed a handsome residence within a stone's throw of Pall Mall. "Few of those who live in the neighborhood imagine what goes on within those quiet portals."

Then he whispered the secret to Nelson, who opened his eyes with astonishment, and inquired why the police permitted such places to exist so openly.

"They regard them as necessities," responded the guide. "It is considered better that something of this kind should be allowed than that respectable families should find their names dragged in the mud. I could, though of course I would not, give you the

names of some ladies of the peerage who have been here. Here comes a carriage. If we walk slowly we may see something."

A veiled lady alighted, who gave directions to her driver to return in an hour, and then silently vanished into the residence.

"A little more careful than most of them," commented the guide. "She is wise enough to muffle her face."

Nelson was a good deal shocked.

"But does not death sometimes ensue?" he asked.

"Y-e-s," was the slow answer. "They take the risk of that. I should be willing to guarantee that bodies are carried out of the rear exit once a month, at least. A certain proportion of the cases are fatal. But, bless you! this is London. It's a big city, and they say that three hundred people go to the cemeteries daily on the average."

Nelson shuddered, and instinctively quickened his pace. He wanted to get away from the vicinity. It seemed to him the wickedest thing he had yet encountered. He wondered if the lady who had just disappeared within those doors would be added to that horrible list of those who never came out alive. He thought of that coachman waiting in vain, hour after hour, until a messenger came down the steps to say that he might go; and he tried to think what report he would make to his master. Cruel, heartless London! In nothing had it seemed so terrible as in this murderous den, with its fair and shining front exposed to the smiling crowds who passed hour by hour, never thinking of the villainy within.

He did not know that every large city of his own America had just such places, and that fortunes are



reaped by the "doctors" who ply this trade. He had never conned the adroitly worded advertisements, published every day by great newspapers, which in their "literary" departments hold up their hands at books like "Thou Shalt Not," and "In Stella's Shadow." He had never inspected the books in the counting rooms of these journals, showing sometimes as high as a hundred dollars a day—thirty thousand dollars a year—received from these advertisements, making the virtuous gentlemen who own the papers sharers in a business which could hardly exist without their aid. He was an innocent young man, was Clifford Nelson, and he thought London wickeder than New York, or Philadelphia, or Boston. He was a very innocent young man, or he would have known that—take them by proportionate population—the capital of Great Britain is in some respects lagging at the rear of the fearful column.

Nelson could not get the house out of his mind, and he found himself several evenings later loitering in its vicinity, as one loiters where men have been guillotined or where suicides have dashed their brains out on the pavement. He marked the elegance of most of the carriages that came and went, and the aristocratic bearing of the ladies who were the patrons of the institutions. Occasionally a common cab was of the list, but it was conspicuous for its ordinary appearance, and its driver usually drove off as soon as his fare had left him, knowing that she could easily engage another from the stream that constantly crowded the thoroughfare.

As he was about to turn away, Nelson saw a veiled figure leave a carriage at the door and proceed up the



steps, that at once riveted his attention. He could not tell for a moment what it was that startled him, but he began to tremble violently and the perspiration started in heavy drops on his forehead. There was something about the walk of the lady, something about her figure that was strangely familiar. He felt assured that he had seen her before, but he could not at first tell anything more definite. It must be merely a fancy. He did not know personally ten women in England, and how could he recognize this one, out of all the throng that filled the vast city? The lady disappeared at the portal, and the door closed behind her.

The young man on the sidewalk felt as if he was being asphyxiated. He could hardly breathe. He was sure, the longer he thought of it, that he knew the lady, and he had an awful sense of guilt that he permitted her to enter the place without at least uttering a word of warning. But how could he have the temerity to do that when he did not even know her name? The veil over her face concealed her identity. The carriage that brought her had gone its way. There was no one to ask, and the lady herself was out of his reach. It must be imagination. He started to walk away, trying to make himself believe that he had allowed his senses to wander.

And then it came upon him like a thunderbolt!

No! It was too ridiculous! It could not be Alma, and all the resemblances in the world did not make it more likely! He thought he would go to her hotel to make sure she was there, and thus dismiss the foolish phantasy. But *if it were!* If by any combination of satanic power she was the woman

who went up those steps, the time he would lose in searching for her might be fatal.

How *could* it be Alma? and yet, when did any two women seem so much alike? What could send that country girl, from the farming district of Iowa, into such a den as this? If it was, she must be there under a misapprehension. She could not know the character of the house that his guide had described.

Then he thought of the night when he met Gerald stalking through the wood, and he asked him to take his life. He recalled what he heard at the meeting between him and his angry father. It came back to him, much quicker than it takes to tell it, that Alma had said she did not intend to remain long with Mrs. Lenoir's party, and had hesitated when he asked her what she intended to do next.

It *might* be Alma! There was one chance in a thousand that the resemblance was real. It was his duty to risk everything to ascertain!

Calming himself with a prodigious effort, Nelson walked up the steps and entered the house, the door being freely opened to him. To the guardian of the portal he said he wished to speak to the lady who last entered. His manner was not calculated to arouse suspicion, and a little bell called a young woman, who was directed to show the gentleman to Room 10. It was evident that he was supposed to belong to the lady for whom he had inquired, and that there was considered nothing extraordinary in his presence there.

"Tell her that she will have to wait some minutes," said the woman, with a foreign inflexion, as she indicated the room. "They are very busy to-night."

He handed the woman a sovereign, for which she thanked him and withdrew.

How could he open that door? If he were wrong, his gentlemanly instincts made him dread meeting with a lady who would have good cause to think him a spy and an interloper. But if he were right! Ah! It would be much harder to tell what to do, then!

His trembling hand was on the door and in another second he was in the room.

Alma—it was none other—stood at a mirror, with her veil removed, trying to eradicate the look of apprehension from her face. When she heard the door open, she turned, supposing it to be an attendant. It is not easy to describe her trepidation when she saw Nelson. She took one step toward him and then sank upon the nearest sofa.

"You must not faint!" he exclaimed, with startling vividness. "You must take leave of this house, and not an instant is to be lost!"

She had not fainted, and she did not mean to. There was a great deal of force in her when she was aroused, and for weeks she had been preparing her mind for this ordeal.

"Take your hand off!" she said, for he had grasped her by the arm.

"Nonsense!" he replied, excitedly. "You will leave here at once, and with me. There are other ways of committing suicide than to put yourself in the hands of the wretches who own this house."

"You cannot frighten me by talking of death," she answered, coldly. "It is welcome, in any form it chooses to assume."

He was astounded at the audacity of her words and the determination of her manner.

"If you covet death," he said, "at least die where it will not also bring disgrace."

"Disgrace!" She laughed recklessly. "You know I am here, and you know why, or you can guess. Is there any disgrace that can equal that? Besides, they will give me a *chance* to redeem my name. It is only a chance, but it may succeed. What can you offer better?"

He talked to her with all the force that he could muster for the next five minutes, and nothing that he said had the least effect on the determined girl. He told her he would find Gerald. He said he would furnish her all the money she needed, if there was any want of funds, to go as far away as she pleased, until her trouble was over, but he insisted that she must not imperil her life. She had an answer ready for every point that he made. She was there, and she would not go.

"You can tell my father what you please," she said. "You can put it in the newspapers, if you wish. I know you will do nothing of the kind. It will not avail if you argue till doomsday."

One of the attendants of the place knocked at the door, and then entered. He looked surprised to see Nelson there.

"We have concluded," said Clifford, in a firm voice, "that we will leave here."

"The lady is related to you?" said the man interrogatively.

"Yes."

Then Alma found her voice.

"It is not true !" she exclaimed indignantly. "He has no right to dictate what I shall do."

The man looked from one to the other and shrugged his shoulders.

"You must settle it between you," said he.

"We are going," said Nelson, taking Alma by the arm again.

The hands of the attendant were raised deprecatingly.

"You ought to know that this is no place for quarrels," he said. "If your husband wishes you to go, it is his affair. Give me twenty-five pounds, and retire quietly."

"Twenty-five devils !" retorted Nelson.

He had not half the sum mentioned with him.

Alma was trying vainly all this time to release Clifford's grasp, which hurt her severely, but he held her as in a vise.

"There is ten pounds," cried Clifford, throwing down his purse. "It is all I have here, and you must wait for the rest till I can send it. Make way. We have wasted time enough."

He started to drag Alma from the room, but the attendant barred the way. Enraged beyond endurance Nelson struck the man a blow that floored him. Then, taking the girl as if she were a bundle of straw he started for the outer door. But here he had the door-opener to deal with, and the delay allowed the man who had been knocked down to arouse several of the other attendants, who came running to the spot where Clifford was trying to escape with the unwilling girl.

Seeing that it was becoming a serious matter, Nelson released his hold on Alma, and struck out



right and left. He managed to get the door open in the *mêlée*, and to get outside of it, but some of the servants who had been hit by his fists did not mean to let him off so easily. They followed him, and the battle was renewed on the steps. Being three to one they would soon have had him *hors du combat*, had not aid come from an unexpected quarter. A passer-by, seeing that three men had one down and were belaboring him without mercy, sprang into the fight and turned the tide of battle.

"What do you want to do—kill him?" he asked, assisting the prostrate figure to rise.

By this time others of the household had joined the party, and seeing their friends worsted by the new-comer, they set upon him like a parcel of wolves. He had not time to put up his hands when a well-directed blow sent him to earth. His head struck the curbstone, and he was immediately unconscious.

A tardy policeman finally elbowed his way through the crowd. The assailants had previously scattered with celerity. He bent over the figure on the sidewalk.

Alma came from the residence, being pushed out with no gentle motion. The managers had received from her the balance of the sum they demanded, but had declined to have anything more to do with a person who brought such discord into their house. She tried her best to evade Nelson, but he had her by the arm again, and she did not like to make a scene in the street.

"Here is some one," he said, harshly, "whom you may wish to see."

Gerald's face was turned toward the sky, and with



the blood that trickled from the wound it looked sufficiently deathlike. Alma gave a smothered cry and threw herself upon the ground by his side. Womanlike, she forgot her injuries in the presence of her beloved.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

**"GOD KNOWS THAT I LOVE YOU!"**

"Do you know him?" asked the officer.

"Yes, sir," said Clifford. "If you will call a carriage I will take him to my hotel, and procure the best attendance."

The officer demurred, and after some delay the matter was arranged by taking the injured man into the nearest physician's office, that an examination might be had. With the consent of the doctor Gerald was afterwards conveyed in an ambulance to Nelson's apartments, where everything was done for him that skill could suggest. It was a strange revolution that had come so suddenly to one so long filled with bitterness, and who now, finding Gerald hurt in his defence, treated him as if he were a brother.

Alma was crushed by the occurrence. She accompanied the party to the hotel, for she could not bear that Gerald should be taken out of her sight. She explained to Nelson, between her sobs, that she had that day left Mrs. Lenoir, who had started for the Riviera, and who had been instructed by Mr. Adams

to allow his daughter to remain in London if she preferred. She had not told Nelson of her intention, as she hoped to escape him, and believed the easiest way was to let him think she had gone south with the rest of them. As she had taken rooms at a new hotel there was no need of her hastening there, and she wanted to help nurse Gerald back to consciousness and health.

Nelson did a good deal of thinking during the rest of that night, for he did not close his eyes in sleep. The doctor assured him that Gerald had received no hurt that would be lasting. But the position in which he had found Alma, and the strange bringing of her and her lover together opened up a problem that required a great deal of study. He knew that Gerald was in the city with his father, with Colonel Staples and with Edith. He did not know that the marriage had already taken place, or all his acts might have been different. He endeavored to consider the matter apart from his own interests, for he loved Edith with all his heart, and could not bear to think that she was to become Gerald's wife. He tried to put himself aside, and consider only the duty of Gerald toward this girl who now bent over his pillow in agony, and whom he had driven to the edge of crime, perhaps of death. It was clearly Gerald's greatest obligation to right the wrong he had done. Alma loved him, and unless he had greatly changed he cared more than a little for her. When he knew what had happened he would see his duty. Thus thought Clifford, and the long night wore away.

In the morning Gerald knew his friends, though he was very weak. They told him in a few words

how they had found him hurt in the street, and had brought him there. He was much surprised to see Alma and Clifford together. By noon he felt strong enough to ask the questions that rose to his mind, and when he was alone with Clifford, Alma having retired to take the rest she needed, he began his inquiries.

"I can't talk much," he said, "but tell me one thing. Is she your wife?"

Clifford stared at him blankly.

"She? Who?" he asked.

"Alma."

"Why, what an idea! Certainly not. Such a thing was never thought of. We happened to meet accidentally, just before we saw you."

"Upon your word?" he said.

"Upon my honor."

"But you have always loved her."

"Never," said Clifford. "That was your mistake."

The questioner was satisfied, though he could not understand the last denial.

"Have you notified my—my father—of my condition?"

"No, but I shall do so, as soon as you tell me where he can be found."

"I would rather you did not. I would like to hide here for awhile away from all of them."

"Away from Edith, too?" asked Clifford, soberly.

"From her most of all. I have no right to ask a favor of you, but I do ask this. I beg it. I have written to them that they will not see me again. Keep me where none of them can find me till I am well enough to travel."

**It** was a very peculiar request, but Nelson was quite willing to grant it. An arrangement was made at once with the hotel to provide an extra suite of rooms, and Gerald was assured that he was more than welcome to stay as long as he pleased.

Nelson talked with Alma when she awoke, and then he left the hotel with a very sober countenance. He went to the office of the trans-Atlantic cable, and sent a long dispatch. He was uneasy as a fish out of water until the next day, when a brief answer came. The answer contained but one word, "Yes," but it was sufficient, and Nelson could not remember any time in his life when he had felt so happy.

Gerald recovered rapidly under the kind care of his friend—now his friend again, surely—his old sweetheart, and the able physician who had been summoned. He was alone a good deal with Alma, and it surprised her that he said so little about the past or the future. But she had taken Nelson's advice and waited with patience till he should be quite well again, as he assured her something was certainly going to happen.

Eleven days after the dispatch from America had been received an envelope of large dimensions was delivered at the hotel, addressed to "Mr. Clifford Nelson." That individual opened it and uttered a cry of joy as he inspected its contents. He lost no time in going to see Gerald, who was up and dressed and occupied at the moment in reading a newspaper.

"I am going to talk to you more solemnly than I ever did in my life," was his greeting. "Are you prepared to listen?"

A silent affirmative was the answer he received.

Gerald was somewhat alarmed by the words and manner of his host.

"I have known you for five years," said Nelson. "I have loved you, hated you, despised you, in turn. To-day, when I reflect what I have to tell, I pity you."

There was no reply, but the still figure was in rapt attention.

"You used to tell me that you could not tell which of two beautiful girls you cared for most. One night I met you coming from one of them in a state approaching insanity. When your mind cleared, you told me that you had decided between these girls and that nothing could ever change your love from the one to whom you had given it—Alma Adams. Afterwards you left her—left her without a word of farewell. Since then rumor and the public prints have announced that you were to marry the other one. I do not know, out of all this conglomeration, which of them you now believe dearest to you, but I do know that there is a reason, and one that could not well be stronger, why you should select the one you told me you loved that night, in the wood at Jefferson."

Gerald uttered a stifled cry of anguish.

"I cannot spare you, for I do not know how to put my story into delicate phrase. What I came to tell you is, Alma Adams will be the unwedded mother of your child unless—"

The tortured man had sprung to his feet.

"My God!" he groaned. He staggered a moment and then cried: "You have come too late!"

"No," said Clifford, calmly. "It is never too late to repair a wrong. To save you and her I have com-



mitted a misdemeanor that could make me liable to imprisonment if it is ever discovered in Iowa. I have bribed Justice Moseley to send me a certificate that he married you and Alma nearly four months ago. Here is the document." He took out the paper as he spoke. "For the sake of the honor of a lovely girl I have made myself a criminal. She does not know yet. It remains for you to tell her, if you wish to profit by it."

Gerald heard the concluding statement eagerly.

"It has been recorded?" he exclaimed. "As far as the record goes, I am the husband of Alma?"

"Precisely."

He fell on his knees and kissed the coat of his friend, with the air of a devotee before the shrine of his saint.

"Send her here," he said, brokenly.

Clifford gladly withdrew, and in a few moments Alma entered the room where Gerald was.

"Did you wish to see me?" she asked, surprised at the nervousness of his manner.

"Yes," he answered, huskily. "Read this."

He handed her the certificate of marriage and she read it through. Then she looked up, with amazement written on every feature.

"Gerald, what does it mean?"

Then he told her, gently as he could, what Nelson had done, and asked her if she would accept him.

"I am your husband," he said, "according to the laws of our State."

"But—is it enough?" she asked, half frightened.

"We have only to live up to it," he answered.

She shook her head.

"God knows that I love you !" she said. "I have



been wicked once, let me not make the mistake again!"

He put his arms about her.

"There is another to be thought of, my darling."

"*You know?*"

She hid her face in her hands.

"I cannot tell what to say," she added, after a long pause.

"I will not ask you to say anything now. The record will save your reputation, and we can never thank Cliff enough for it. I told you long ago that you were mine in the sight of Heaven, and so you are to-day. But I will wait till you are satisfied."

Just then a waiter came to the door and handed him a card. He saw the name on it as men see things in dreams.

"You must go now for a little while, Alma," he said. "I have a visitor waiting on important business."

He kissed her good-bye, and showed her to the exit of the hotel that was least frequented. Then he went back and told the waiter to show the lady up.

It was a queer name that he found on the card—a name he had never heard before—"Mrs. Gerald Garston."

When the door opened again, Edith was at the threshold.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN.

Gerald was so overcome at the sight of his wife that for almost a minute he forgot to ask her to take a seat. She was hardly less confused, for his manner disconcerted her. Presently he came to himself, however, and handed her a chair. Each hoped the other would speak first, but it was Edith who did so.

"I have not come here to reproach you," she said, in a voice that trembled in spite of all her effort. "Neither my father nor yours know that I have found you. It is too much to say that I have not suffered, but I have no intention of complaining. I feared that harm had happened to you, and that, in your desperate mood, you might do something desperate. I heard of the accident that brought you to this house—in fact, it was through the doctor that attended you that the news came, very strangely, to me. I learn that you are now recovered and that I need have no fear on that score. And all I want is to say good-bye, and to tell you that my earnest prayers will always be offered for your happiness."

If she had come with a knife or a revolver he could have met her better. He bowed his head in humiliation, and she proceeded, her voice growing stronger.

"I ought to have known—I was blind that I did not see—how distasteful it was to you to unite your life with mine. I was over-persuaded by my father, who ascribed natural causes to your strange moods. On the morning of our marriage I told him that I

felt it ought to be postponed until you were in a different state, but he said so much that I reluctantly consented to go on with the ceremony. All that day I noted your aberration, and when you went out of my room at night I really did not expect you to return. I sat waiting till after midnight, and then sent a messenger for father. He came, and was much shocked by what I told him. His heart was set on seeing me happy, and he thought there was a disgrace in this desertion that I could never recover from. We talked together till morning, and then your letter was received, settling our doubts. Your father was in a great rage when he heard of it. He declared that you should be brought back and compelled to carry out your vows. I told him there was one person who could effectually stop that. I said I only wanted to tell you how free you were to go and come in any part of the world, as far as I was concerned. I knew you had not taken such a course except under a pressure you could not resist. What that pressure was I could only guess, but I think I guessed rightly. I believed it the love of another—of Alma Adams."

He tried to speak then, but she would not let him yet.

"If it *was* the reason, Gerald, I am glad. Yes, from the bottom of my heart, I shall rejoice if the outcome of this matter is the happiness of two people whom I care for as I do you and Alma. And I have news that I know you will be glad to hear. You and I are still single!"

"Still single!" he gasped.

"Yes. It has been discovered that the clergyman who professed to marry us had lost his standing in his

denomination, and had no right to perform the ceremony."

It seemed impossible that he could have heard her aright, and yet there she was, before him, as real as she had been in those dear old days when he had carried her across brooks and walked with her under the shade trees on the road to the school-house in Jefferson. She spoke with the same gentle accents as if he had never done her that grievous wrong, and introduced into her young life an element that must always cause her pain.

"Edie," he said, and the tender diminutive seemed more appropriate than ever, "I will not say I am sorry to hear this. But you know that all the apologies I could make in a lifetime would not excuse what I have done. And you are not aware, either, of the extent of the wrong I intended to commit."

She started slightly, and looked anxiously at him for an explanation.

"Never did God send two such girls as you and Alma to this sinful earth," he went on. "During all my childhood, during the early days of my manhood—if indeed I have ever been worthy to be called a man—I loved you both with such intensity that I could discover no difference between you. I could not bear to contemplate the day when I should have to give either of you up. Out of that long struggle I emerged with my eyes partly opened. I found that it was—forgive me, Edie—that it was Alma."

She smiled for him to proceed, saying only, "I know it, Gerald."

"It was Alma that I could not live without," he continued, finishing the sentence. "Why, then, did I not say so openly and honestly? Because my

father's affairs—the aid he had received from the Colonel—were known to me. Then Mr. Adams did all in his power to keep Alma and me apart. I had my illness, and you came to nurse me. Alma's mother's death took her away, and letters which I wrote her were never answered. I have since learned that she did not receive them, and they were doubtless intercepted. Discouraged, I came to England with you to see if I could regain my strength. The way my father aided me in that is shown in an analysis that I have recently had made of the contents of this vial."

He took out the vial as he spoke, and held it up before her astonished eyes.

"This was the medicine he gave me, three times a day. The chemist says it is compounded of poisons calculated to undermine the judgment and to make him who takes it subject to easy influence. While I supposed it was intended to build up my system, it was really making of me a more craven creature than nature designed, which God knows was unnecessary. I knew as well as I knew I breathed that I had no right to marry you while my love was still Alma's, but I was in no condition to resist the strong mind that had determined to bend me to its will. He had told me long ago that he would rather see me in my grave than the husband of the girl whose father he hated. I am not trying to find an excuse for what I have done, but only to let you see that there is, after all, a slight palliation."

She leaned toward him with unmistakable sympathy.

"I am very sorry for what you have suffered," she

said, sweetly. "You told me there was something more. I am quite prepared."

He hesitated, but was reassured by her manner.

"Don't despise me any more than you can help," said he. "I had no right to marry you, for another reason. I—I was married already."

She repeated the word "Already," and looked dazed.

"Yes."

He handed her Moseley's certificate, and she grew radiant.

"Are you certain that your father will consent to let everything drop quietly?" he asked.

"Certain? I can swear it!"

"Then I am saved!"

They talked together for the next half hour, and his gratitude increased momentarily.

"How can I ever thank you for your goodness?" he cried.

"I do not wish thanks. Something makes me feel as if it were I who ought to thank you."

"How can that be?"

"I have learned that I did not love you as I thought I did. I liked you so well as the friend of my childhood and youth that I mistook the sentiment for that of love. Had we lived together as husband and wife a few months, I fear the knowledge would have come to me when it was too late to retrace our steps. Alma told me once, many years ago, that she thought I would make a very nice old maid. I have come to the conclusion that she was right."

She had arisen, and he took her by the hand in an ecstasy of delight.

"If I can feel, in the midst of my own happiness,"



he said, "that it has] not been purchased at the cost of yours, there will be nothing left for me to desire."

"You may feel it," said Edith, "for I am convinced that it is true. Now, before I go, can you not send for Alma, that I may assure her also how much I desire that you both should be happy?"

He went to a table and took up a pen, but stopped before he had begun to write.

"You are sure you will say nothing to cause her distress?" he asked. "She has suffered enough, poor child, already."

"Trust me."

He looked into the calm blue eyes, and went on with his writing. Sealing the note in an envelope he rang for a messenger and despatched it.

When Alma came he met her in another apartment and revealed to her the situation. She begged for some time that he would not ask her to see Edith, but finally consented, and the two girls came into each other's presence. An hour later Gerald found them with their arms about each other's necks, as he had seen them a thousand times in the old, contented days.

"We understand everything," said Edith, with her finger on her lips, "and there is nothing more to say."

As he looked at them thus, the feeling of the past came back for an instant. He wanted both of them, and dreaded the opening of the door that was to send one away. But he looked again at Alma, and knew she was the only one whose loss he could not bear.

"I have been telling your wife," said Edith, and she saw that both of them shrank as if she had

struck them, "that you ought not to think of returning to the United States for another year. If you dislike to waste the time you should have devoted to study, it is easy to send for a box of law books and read at your leisure. There are pleasant and inexpensive places on the shores of the Mediterranean where you can finish the winter, and there are villages to the north where you can pass the heated term that follows."

"And shall we ever see you?" he asked, for it seemed like parting from a guardian angel.

"Perhaps," she answered, cheerfully. "It will depend on how well you behave. Alma is to write to me often, giving a minute account of your conduct."

She left them at that, going alone to her carriage, saying that she preferred it. When she had been away an hour or so, Cliff Nelson came and was told of what had happened.

"And you let her go, without telling me she was here!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "Well, if I ever do anything for *you* again!"

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## SAVED BY A MIRACLE.

The concluding chapter of a novel is like the postscript of a school-girl's letter—there are so many things to say that one is almost sure to forget the most important of them.

Ten years have passed since "The Garston Bigamy" occurred, and the secret has been well kept. Outside of those intimately concerned, only you and I, my dear reader, have ever learned of it, and we are too honorable to divulge what we know.

John Garston will not reveal it, either. He was so affected when he heard that Gerald had really married Alvah Adams' daughter that he fell into a fever in London, and died there. His son came to his bed-side, but he dismissed him with curses, and so ended his life. If a parent's blessing be necessary for success on this earth, Gerald will meet with losses, by-and-by. At present he seems to be doing very well indeed, pecuniarily and otherwise.

He never went back to Jefferson. When he had finished a year in Europe he went with his wife—and child, it would not do to forget the little fellow—to New York, and completed his law studies there, after which he entered a pushing firm and achieved success in the profession. He told Edith, when she came, a long time after, to visit them, that he had always tried to give his talents to the side of right, but feared he had sometimes made a mistake. He lives in a residence of his own on Seventy-second

Street; it is unnecessary to mention the number. And three children who look like him climb into the pony-wagon at his door with their nurse and mother, on pleasant afternoons, and take a ride in the park.

When Edith came to see them, she did not come alone. "There!" I hear you exclaim. "I knew that was the way it would turn out!" Well, of course you did. But I must tell the truth, for all that. Clifford Nelson has become—but then, you have followed his career as well as I. Prominent at the bar, leader of his party in the Assembly of his State, and then member of Congress at thirty-two. Everybody knows that, but everybody does not know that he once bribed a justice of the peace to issue a false marriage certificate. We know it, but then, it was one of those wrong things which do so much good that a man ought not to be blamed too severely for them. Alma and Gerald made it right with their consciences by taking the solemn vows before a Protestant minister in an Italian village, and the Iowa record certainly saved the reputation of a girl who, though she did love unwisely, has made one of the best of wives.

There are two old men of Jefferson who are attached friends, rarely spending an evening when they are there except in each other's company. People remember when there was a temporary coldness between them, but that passed away a decade since. Both of them go away quite often to see their married daughters, and there are no residents more highly respected in all the country-side.

Thus we dispose of our principal characters. Happiness seems to reign among them. And yet,

O young and foolish reader, do you think that punishment has not followed, step by step, each infraction of the moral law of which any of them have been guilty? Do you believe that an hour passes when Alma Garston does not wish from the bottom of her heart that one page in her life could be blotted out? She has not quite the courage that she would have had to look all the world in the face, and there are times when her sweet cheek reddens because some lady in her presence raises her voice to denounce a hapless wanderer from the fold.

"I was saved by a miracle," she whispers to herself. "But for Clifford's bravery and Edith's sacrifice I might have been even as those despised ones."

**THE END.**

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